



**Higher National and Graded Unit
Qualification Verification Summary Report 2022
Care**

Verification group number: 82

Introduction

The HNC in Social Services continued to be delivered across Scotland with over fifty centres delivering the GK89 15 award. The majority of centres were able to deliver the award using the assessment processes in place prior to the SQA contingency arrangements for the COVID-19 pandemic. There were challenges as social care settings involve placement opportunities for learners to work alongside 'vulnerable' individuals; as a result, centres had to offer SQA prepared case studies for particular units. Despite these challenges, a programme of 'virtual qualification' visits took place during the academic session.

As an HN team, we decided at our annual standardisation update to focus most of our visits on four core units and on a few visits, the graded unit. These units were:

H8MN Care in Contemporary Society
H8KC Leadership Starts With Me
H8MM Lifespan Development Theoretical Approaches
H8NM Care Practice
H8X9 Graded Unit

The HNC in Social Services is assessed holistically to allow qualification verifiers to scrutinise optional units at the same time.

Category 2: Resources

Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; reference, learning and assessment materials.

All centres are slowly returning to a 'new normality' after the COVID-19 pandemic. During the year, there were occasions when the number of COVID-19 cases grew. A knock-on effect was that learners' access to programmes moved to limited face-to-face contact and increased virtual or electronic communication. This had resource implications as centres had to increase the range of online materials available as well as arrange virtual tutorials and learner meetings.

Almost all of the learner placements were disrupted; as learners are working with clinically 'vulnerable' people, access to most placements could be restricted or halted at short notice.

The SQA Care Team had prepared a range of case studies for the previous academic session, and centres were able to use these resources as an alternative when placements were curtailed. Most, if not all, learners had some access to a placement (albeit restricted in the number of days), so they were able to meet the requirements in relation to 'real work practice' for the achievement of the A/B/C mark for the graded unit. The practice placement is also vital for the three Care SVQ Units, which are included in the GK89 15 award.

All centres visited had review processes in place for updating their learning and reference materials, as well as changes in assessment instruments or changes in assessment and verification procedures.

Category 3: Candidate support

Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.

A small number of learners (less than 5%) have already completed one or more of the three SQA units that are included in the GK89 award and arrangements are in place for accreditation of prior learning (APL). Most learners already work, or have worked, in a care setting and will have attended on-site training; they might also possess some certificates in food hygiene, challenging behaviour, or first aid. Where appropriate, APL was used to prevent over-assessment or minimise repetition of training, and the candidate's prior achievements and development needs were matched to the qualification.

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

Centres have developed a range of resources to support learners, including online and virtual alternatives. During the last three academic sessions, almost all learners' attendance at the centre and placement was affected, and contingency arrangements were put in place. Qualification verifiers reported that candidate support was not adversely affected and all centres worked hard to minimise the disruption.

There was an increased urgency to provide support and structure to learners and minimise the disruption. Centres organised regular support meetings with assessors and tutors. Candidates reported that support was available and raised no problems or issues. Qualification verifiers were able to review the number of learner-assessor meetings and feedback provided, as most centres utilise electronic portfolio platforms that list all the contact dates and provide copies of assessment plans and any feedback or remediation required.

Assessors were able to provide ongoing support as well as maintain regular contact with learners throughout their award.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Evidence for external verification reports as well as discussion with individual qualification verifiers indicated that procedures were consistent and implemented in full, with no adverse comments or concerns from the HN Team members.

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

As part of the pandemic contingency plans put in place by the HN Team, a range of case studies were developed for centres to use. During 2022, not all centres had full access to placement experience as outlined in the course arrangement document. Many were affected in some way with limited access to placements, as learners would be working alongside clinically 'vulnerable' individuals. Centres with placement access throughout the session were able to support learners throughout their GK89 15 award. Validity in assessment was maintained through the SQA Unit Support Packs, accessible via the SQA Secure Site, or through the use of case studies developed by the HN Team and discussed at standardisation meetings. These case studies removed any barriers to individual candidates undertaking the assessment; centres found them useful as they allowed centres to make adjustments for learners who required additional support to achieve their award.

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

Almost all centres use electronic portfolios, and all centres display a plagiarism disclaimer before learners upload any evidence. All learners attend induction, during which centre staff discuss the dangers of plagiarism with them. Evidence in relation to centre policy and procedures was placed on the Evidence Hub and qualification verifiers checked this as part of the verification process. In addition, all HN learners were observed in their placement, and all had a witness testimony added to their graded unit submission. Many college providers also use plagiarism detection software. The HNC is an accredited qualification; any learner who does not comply with the plagiarism policy would also be subject to investigation and scrutiny by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) after the SQA process is completed.

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

Accuracy and consistency in assessors' judgements ensure the integrity of the HNC in Social Services, and that final assessment decisions for the award and final marks for the grading unit are fair and communicated to learners.

The pandemic disrupted the delivery in some colleges and some placements. Some centres had to use a number of the SQA-approved case studies. Reports from qualification visits and external verification discussion at standardisation meetings confirmed that the contingencies made did ensure accuracy and consistency.

Most, if not all, learners had some placement experience and were able to complete the core HN Units, the graded unit and the three SVQ Units that make up the GK89 15 award; this allowed learners to meet the SSSC registration requirements. Centres visited also demonstrated in their standardisation minutes, the scrutiny of learner evidence and the assessment and verification procedures that the SQA requirements were met.

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

SQA produced additional guidance in relation to evidence retention due to the pandemic; qualification verifiers checked that centres adhered to the revised guidance. They also checked the centres' arrangements for returning candidates' evidence held within the electronic portfolio platform. All platforms in use have slightly different systems in place for returning learner evidence, and qualification verifiers checked the procedures during their visit. Clear procedures are in place for the retention of evidence and its return after certification, as well as the eventual disposal by electronic platform providers.

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

All centres were subject to discussions regarding how feedback from qualification verifiers would be disseminated, including the arrangements for managing and recommendations or sanctions. Standardisation meeting minutes were also checked to ensure that information is disseminated and discussed, and that any action points are resolved.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2021–22:

- ◆ Centre staff made themselves available to support candidates throughout their award, with ongoing contact through virtual, email, telephone as well as face-to-face contact when possible.
- ◆ Placements were altered at short notice due to COVID-19 infection surges; learners needed and were provided with support and reassurance during what continues to be a challenging time for the care sector.

Specific areas for development

No specific areas for development were identified this year.