Good Practice in Assessment and Grading: Grading Review

Next Generation Higher National Certificate in Television Pilot Centres: New College Lanarkshire and Edinburgh College

Introduction

Learners across Scotland have been carrying out the Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) successfully for many years. We are adapting our Higher National (HN) qualifications to give learners the skills they need to thrive in the 21st century workplace. This includes a new approach to grading. We have replaced the graded unit of the current qualifications with a new 'whole qualification' grading approach. This better reflects the achievement of learners and reduces the tendency to focus learning and teaching on an end assessment.

This grading review shares the experiences of two pilot centres for the Next Generation Higher National Certificate (NextGen: HNC) in Television, and explains how they made grading judgements on their first cohorts of learners. It captures the key points of their approaches and experiences and supports ongoing reviews and evaluations during the pilot phase.

Background

The grading review took place on 4 February 2023, and was attended by:

♦ New College Lanarkshire (NCL)

♦ Edinburgh College (EC)

♦ two external quality assurers

♦ the senior external quality assurer

♦ the qualification manager

♦ the qualification officer

♦ the new product development manager

♦ the research and policy manager for grading

Both NCL and EC completed grading for their first cohorts in summer 2022. They reflected on that process, as well as further adaptations they had made to the delivery model for their second year of delivery.

Both centres provided examples of learner product evidence that demonstrated grades of Achieved, Achieved with Merit, and Achieved with Distinction. The product evidence was comprised of short television programmes, and centres viewed these alongside learners' assessment tracking records.

The NextGen: HNC in Television uses the key competency grading approach, 'Model 1'. In this model, learners work on projects set by the centre. Each project is assessed against a set of three key competencies:

♦ sector-specific competence
♦ academic competence
♦ professional behaviours

Each competence is split into a set of qualification-specific criteria, which form the marking matrix. These criteria reflect the types of performance we expect learners to demonstrate, and map to learning outcomes within the mandatory units. They allow learners' evidence to come from across all the qualification content, to form whole qualification grading.

Each competence has a set of descriptors for performance, aligned to a particular grade standard. These descriptors are associated with the criteria for that competence, and include:

♦ Not Achieved
♦ Achieved
♦ Achieved with Merit
♦ Achieved with Distinction

These align with the overall qualification grade in grading matrices, also known as rubrics.

You can find information on the [NextGen: HN grading models](#) on the NextGen: HN web page.

Applying whole qualification grading — delivery

Both NCL and EC carried out assessment throughout the academic year. The grading review focused on learners' final short television programmes, which they had conceived and directed. For both centres, assessment ranged across a minimum of three projects and small pieces of one-off assessment.

NCL split delivery across two semesters. They treated assessment in the first semester as formative, but used assessment in the second semester to make their final grading judgement. Learners' three projects were themed as:

- film noir
- horror
- short film

Learners had additional technical assessments, to ensure they had covered the full range of knowledge and understanding required in the qualification.

EC mapped assessment by splitting the course content into three categories, in line with typical television activities:

- pre-production
- production
- post-production

This covered four projects:

- two documentaries (one formative, one summative)
- two dramas (one formative, one summative)

Both centres mapped each piece of assessment to the qualification content, and created tracking documents to record learner achievement (in one case using Microsoft Teams, in the other using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet). In the case of Microsoft Teams, learners had access to check their progress. Learners couldn't access the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, but they could check their progress on a separate digital learning platform.

Each piece of assessment had been graded, after being marked by the centres in some cases. These grading judgements were based on the centres' professional judgement and were linked to the evidence requirements in the unit specifications, as well as the grading matrix statements. The grading judgements were captured by one centre in a tracker that rated pieces of work on a red-yellow-amber-green scale, with red linked to Not Achieved and green linked to Achieved with Distinction.

Both centres recorded learners' meta-skills development throughout the qualification. Where meta-skills had aligned with the professional behaviours in the grading model, this helped to inform grading judgements on those professional behaviours. However, meta-skills themselves were not part of the grading judgement. Tutors and assessors noted their observations on meta-skills development, including for example 'x learner was vocal and proactive in taking part in activities this week', or 'x learner sat back and let others lead on projects this week'. In addition, learners kept reflective diaries covering their meta-skills. Both centres reflected that meta-skills had driven their approach to delivery, for example through continuous recording and reflection on activities.

EC took an analytical approach to their assessment tracking and recording. They split the content of the course under broad headings of 'pre-production', 'production' and

'post-production'. This gave the content a logical categorisation in relation to the project work that they would use for assessment.

Rationale for approach

NCL and EC had engaged enthusiastically with the new approach, and worked beyond expectations for delivery in a 'normal' year. This may be a reflection of the first year of a new approach to the qualification, or it may be a reflection of the proactivity of the pilot centres.

Both centres understood the use of smaller assessments over the duration of the course, building up to a picture of learners' achievements, to be part of the purpose of the new grading approach. These smaller assessments were often used to demonstrate underpinning or theoretical knowledge.

It is possible that centres may have 'over-evidenced' learners' achievements to ensure that final grades were satisfactory, from an external quality assurance point of view, as these were new and untried qualifications. Moving over to a new grading model takes adjustment in terms of process and terminology. Both NCL and EC were vigilant when testing the model, referring back to the previous grading methods while making sense of the new approach.

Grading the qualification — final judgements

The centres matched final grading judgements against learners' evidence, using their trackers to ensure they aligned in a 'best fit'. They used learners' television programmes as product evidence to further validate the assessors' grading judgements.

NCL and EC both reflected that the grading picture had changed throughout delivery, for example learners who had started as 'Achieved' type learners, could move up to 'Achieved with Merit' or 'Achieved with Distinction' by the end of the course.

What are the benefits of this approach for learners and centres?

The centres had a very good sense of each learner's standard in the context of a clear purpose for the qualification, as this had not changed.

Both NCL and EC were confident in their judgements, which were supported by learners' evidence and the centres' tracking documents. This was demonstrated clearly on the day of the grading review, and although the purpose of the day was not to quality assure grading judgements, the external quality assurer was satisfied with the centres' judgements.

Meta-skills had provided a clear framework for the centres to observe learners participating in group work and other collaborative work. Both centres reflected that meta-skills aligned well with the professional behaviours competency.

Both centres said that learners engaged with the course throughout the academic year, as they were aware that their work was being assessed continually. They noted that learners felt their final grades were justified and represented their performance throughout the academic year.

Implementing the new approach required a significant amount of additional work, however now that the work is done, both centres are keen to continue with the approach, and support its rollout across their campuses and beyond.

Initial conclusions and proposals for testing

Outcomes from the grading review include reviewing the descriptions of performance within the matrix or rubric to better reflect the qualification and standardise the language. For example, in one description of performance it states: "[H]as an accurate and insightful understanding of the workflow, the link between selected equipment and the impact on the final product." This would be improved by: "[H]as an accurate and insightful practical understanding of workflow …"

In addition, we are creating a whole qualification grading process and judgement toolkit, using both centres' grading trackers, to support a standardised approach to feedback and grading.