



**August 2021**

## **Subject guidance for internally assessed qualifications in 2021–22**

Please read this document in conjunction with [guidance for the assessment of internally assessed qualifications](#) issued to centres in August 2021.

<b>Group award title:</b>	HNC in Social Sciences
<b>Group award code:</b>	GP1K 15 GC3J 15 (finishes July 2022)

### **Units and/or outcomes where conditions of assessment can or cannot be altered**

All units should be completed following local authority guidance.

It is possible to administer all of the assessments for the HNC in Social Sciences online in session 2021–22 should COVID-19 restrictions continue to be in place.

### **Adaptations to evidence requirements to help manage assessment**

#### **Higher National Units**

Centres can use the flexibilities that were introduced by SQA in August 2020, including integrating assessment and changing closed-book assessments to open-book assessments.

Please refer to the document, [Supporting the delivery, assessment and verification of SQA units, session 2020–21: Information and guidance for centres](#) published in August 2020.

#### **Graded units**

The need to complete the assessment of graded units (exam-based and project-based) in HNC, HND and SQA Advanced Qualifications for session 2020–21 was removed, with some exceptions, in November 2020.

Please refer to the document, [Guidance on gathering key evidence for Higher National Graded Units in session 2020–21](#).

These adaptations will help maximise time available for learning and teaching, ensure that the validity and integrity of the HNC in Social Sciences is maintained and will help to ensure the safety of lecturers and learners.

## **Additional guidance/information**

### **Social Sciences Qualifications Support Team (QST)**

The Social Sciences QST includes members from 11 Scottish colleges and SQA qualifications staff. The team monitors the delivery of the HNC and HND in Social Sciences, including monitoring standards. It also provides advice to SQA about supporting the delivery of these qualifications.

The QST met in November 2020 to discuss the SQA announcements. Members felt that it would be beneficial to work collaboratively across centres to agree common approaches to assessment to ensure a measure of consistency and standardisation.

The advice that follows is intended to offer support to those delivering the HNC and HND in Social Sciences in session 2021–22. Centres have discretion over how they implement the guidance issued by SQA and the recommendations of the QST. The guidance applies to the current and lapsing versions of the awards.

### **Assessment of graded units**

The QST recommends that graded unit 1 is not carried out as a 3-hour closed-book exam, but assessed using SQA's guidance and supporting advice from the QST.

### **Grading assessments**

SQA published advice on how to grade coursework that will form the graded unit 1 judgement. However, the following suggestions may be of help and members of the QST have agreed to adopt these approaches to assessment:

Centres should use the mandatory and other contributing units to the graded unit to make holistic judgements of learner performance. The grade for learners should be derived from the Research and Methodology unit plus two other subject areas that best reflect the learner's subject strength and academic abilities (similar to the choice they would make for the traditional graded unit 1 exam).

This will be an ongoing process and the subjects may change as the academic year progresses. However, the final grades should be derived from the Research and Methodology unit and A and B units for two subjects. Lecturers should decide which work the learner should be graded on; they will select subjects with the highest grades.

Units that do not contribute to the graded unit 1 exam should not be included in the options for grading, for example Criminology.

Units used for graded unit purposes will be double marked against the evidence requirements of the unit and against the grade related criteria A–C in the graded units.

The grade will come from the first submission of the learner's work, regardless of remediation or resubmission requirements to achieve the unit evidence requirements. In the HNC in Social Sciences, it is possible for a learner to achieve an A, B or C grade for work that requires minor remediation to meet the unit evidence requirements (as stated in the unit specification).

If a learner has to re-sit the alternative to the closed-book assessment where, for example, a completely different topic, theories or studies are used, they could achieve any grade for this work. However, if a learner's work needs major revision or if they are required to fully resubmit their original work, they should not be graded for this assessment, regardless the standard of the resubmission.

To achieve a grade, learners do not need to achieve every grade related criterion. Centre staff, through professional dialogue, should record and review the grades for the three subjects chosen for grading purposes, and an average of the grades will then inform the overall grade.

### **Alternatives to closed-book unit assessments**

To maintain the integrity of the HNC in Social Sciences and offer some standardisation across all centres, the QST advocates the following suggestions for alternatives to closed-book assessments:

- ◆ Continue to sample information for the alternative assessment, allowing depth of knowledge on specific areas rather than assessing the whole topic.
- ◆ Keep the same word counts as advised in the closed-book assessments to challenge learners and develop their skills in concise responses.
- ◆ For parity, learner responses must adhere to set approximations for all assessment word counts with upper and lower thresholds to ensure fair marking. Where a learner response exceeds a threshold, this should be considered when looking at the grade related criteria when marking for graded unit purposes. Centres should ensure learners are aware of this grading process.
- ◆ Use a range of diverse assessments to avoid repetition and develop a range of skills that support the aims of the group awards and accommodate the demands of remote delivery. For example, four closed-book assessments at HNC level should not be replaced with four open-book essays.
- ◆ Work within course teams to develop different assessments across the programme. Consider, where possible, a different assessment method for each alternative assessment, for example a wiki or blog, presentation, online timed assessment, response to a stimulus scenario, restricted response, portfolio or project, academic poster, professional dialogue or interview.
- ◆ If possible, the centre should incorporate one timed response in the alternative assessments, considering issues around digital poverty and accessibility. This may depend on the logistics and access to ICT. For example, learners could have 24 hours to access and complete an assessment.
- ◆ Except for timed assessments, a bibliography should be submitted with the coursework.
- ◆ Where possible, maintain two separate assessments for double credit units. Feedback on the first assessment in a B unit could give learners the opportunity to improve their work in the second assessment.
- ◆ The QST's advice is to avoid combining assessments for these awards. Overall, this will not reduce learner workload and could lead to difficulties in remediation and re-assessment. Learners will benefit from feedback from their first submission.

For the alternative to closed-book assessments, avoid using SQA and centre prior-verified ASPs on SQA's secure website. Their use would mean they are no longer secure and they would become invalid. If a centre wishes to use a centre prior-verified assessment it should be one that their own centre has devised. SQA should also be notified of this. Please email [gvprior@sqa.org.uk](mailto:gvprior@sqa.org.uk).

### **Useful links**

[Assessment Decision Tree](#)

[HN Graded Units: Frequently Asked Questions](#)

If you have any questions, please contact [qualification.development@sqa.org.uk](mailto:qualification.development@sqa.org.uk).