

NextGen: HN unit specification

Advanced Administration Software Applications (SCQF level 8)

Unit code: JO3Z 48

SCQF level: 8 (40 SCQF credit points)

Valid from: August 2026

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver and assess the unit.

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Unit purpose

This unit provides learners with advanced knowledge, understanding and skills in desktop digital applications. Learners manage, process and share digital information. They integrate application packages to analyse data, produce reports, to support confident decision making.

It is suitable for learners studying administration and business. It is primarily intended for learners who want to pursue a career or further study in business management, administration, or information technology, but is also appropriate for those who want to develop their digital and analytical skills.

Entry to the unit is at your centre's discretion. Before they start the unit, we recommend learners have one or more of the following:

- competence in using standard desktop applications such as word processing, spreadsheets and presentation software
- previous experience of working with digital information in an academic or workplace context
- a relevant qualification or units at SCQF level 7 (for example Administration Applications in Practice unit)

This is a mandatory unit in Higher National Diploma (HND) Administration Management and Digital Business Technologies. Learners can also study it on a stand-alone basis.

Learners who complete the unit as part of the HND can progress to degree-level study or find employment in senior administration or supervisory roles in a business environment.

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. use advanced features of word processing and presentation software to design and produce professional business documents
2. apply complex spreadsheet functions and analytical tools to manage, interpret and visualise business data effectively
3. create and optimise sophisticated database systems to support business operations
4. design and deliver business presentations and data visualisations that communicate insights effectively at strategic level
5. use project management software to plan, carry out, monitor and evaluate business projects

Evidence requirements

Assess all outcomes using a practical, project-based assignment that is set in a realistic workplace content. Learners must integrate and apply all of the following five skill areas:

- word processing
- spreadsheets
- databases
- presentation software
- digital project management tools

Assess under open-book conditions, where learners have access to workplace materials such as:

- digital resources
- application packages
- guidance materials

Learners must show evidence of critical analysis, the ability to integrate information from multiple professional sources, effective use of advanced digital tools, and professional standards of communication and presentation.

Learners must submit evidence digitally. Their evidence must demonstrate:

- **Integration:** linking applications seamlessly across word processing, database, spreadsheets, presentation and project management software.
- **Professional quality:** documents, reports and outputs suitable for a business or executive audience.
- **Validity and reliability:** learners produce their own work that reflects the unit's learning outcomes.

You must ensure authenticity and originality of all submitted work.

Learners complete tasks individually to evidence their own competence, though collaborative learning activities may form part of the delivery.

Outcome 1

Learners must produce evidence to show they can:

- produce a fully integrated, professional management report using word processing software

The report must:

- incorporate data and outputs from the spreadsheet, database, dashboard and project plan
- demonstrate clear analysis that supports strategic business decision making

To produce the report, learners:

- apply styles, including paragraph, character and linked styles, effectively to create and maintain consistent, professional formatting
- use section breaks to manage complex documents

- apply headers, footers, and page numbering, including different first pages and section-specific formatting
- generate a table of contents, index, and cross-references for straightforward navigation
- organise columns, text boxes and graphic elements for layout control
- create and modify document templates
- implement form fields and content controls for structured input
- execute mail merge for personalised bulk communications
- develop Quick Parts and AutoText (or equivalent) for reusable content
- manage citation and bibliography tools
- integrate cloud services for real-time collaboration

Outcome 2

Learners must produce evidence to show they can:

- create and manipulate large datasets (big data) using spreadsheet and database tools, applying advanced analysis functions to generate meaningful business insights
- develop a dynamic dashboard that provides real-time, visualised insights into business performance, and link this to the management report for decision-making purposes

To produce this evidence, learners:

- write nested formulae using logical, lookup, and reference functions
- use date and time functions
- use statistical and financial functions
- define and use named ranges for clarity and reusability
- develop automated processes to simplify and accelerate workflow tasks
- design custom templates and reusable models
- import and export data from external sources
- use data visualisation and business intelligence tools to analyse and present information
- design interactive dashboards with slicers and controls

- use Power Query (or equivalent) for data transformation and cleaning
- apply Power Pivot (or equivalent) for data modelling and relationships
- manage data protection and access controls
- use error checking and auditing tools (for example formula tracing)
- use advanced charting features to visualise data

Outcome 3

Learners must produce evidence to show they can:

- design and implement a structured database to ensure accuracy, integrity and effective handling of business data

The database must link to other applications to support reporting and dashboard functionality.

To produce this evidence, learners:

- design and create relational databases
- write advanced queries
- use report generation and data extraction
- apply data validation and integrity management
- integrate with other systems or data sources
- implement security and access control principles
- create a landing page for ease of navigation

Outcome 4

Learners must produce evidence to show they can:

- deliver a presentation that:
 - communicates the findings and recommendations of the project at a strategic level
 - demonstrates effective integration of information across multiple software tools

To produce this evidence, learners:

- adapt content for different audiences and contexts
- use speaker notes and timed rehearsals for delivery planning
- integrate calls to action, summaries and key takeaways
- optimise text and visuals for clarity and engagement
- develop custom templates for recurring presentations
- incorporate linked and embedded data from external sources
- implement interactive elements including hyperlinks, navigation buttons and branching slides
- collaborate using editing and version control in cloud environments
- export and format presentations for different platforms
- show consistency across fonts, alignment and spacing
- apply design principles:
 - contrast
 - repetition
 - alignment
 - proximity
- use high-quality visuals and avoid clutter
- proofread and review for accuracy and professionalism
- deliver a professional presentation

Outcome 5

Learners must produce a project plan using appropriate digital project management tools. The project plan must include:

- planning
- organisation
- progress monitoring
- an evaluation of outcomes

To produce this evidence, learners:

- create a project plan and schedule
- monitor and control project budgets and resource allocation throughout the project lifecycle
- assess and mitigate risks
- analyse and report project performance
- collaborate and communicate with their team
- continually evaluate and improve their project plan

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 1 Learners should understand: • styles, formatting and section breaks • headers, footers and page numbering • navigation tools: ○ table of contents ○ index ○ cross-references • layout features: ○ columns ○ text boxes ○ graphics • templates and reusable content • forms and mail merge • referencing tools • cloud collaboration	Outcome 1 Learners can: • apply styles and manage multi-section documents • customise headers, footers and page numbering • generate and update navigation tools • design professional layouts • create and apply templates • build forms and carry out mail merges • insert citations and bibliographies • share, co-author and manage versions online
Outcome 2 Learners should understand: • advanced formulae and functions • data validation and protection • charts, pivot tables and conditional formatting • scenario and sensitivity analysis • linking and consolidating data • automation tools • big data handling	Outcome 2 Learners can: • apply complex calculations • control and secure data entry • create charts, pivots and highlight trends • test scenarios and outcomes • integrate data across sheets • automate tasks with macros • manage and analyse large datasets

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 3 Learners should understand: • database structures and relationships • table, query, form and report design • data integrity and validation rules • Structured Query Language (SQL) basics • linking with other applications • database security	Outcome 3 Learners can: • build relational database models • develop and manage tables, queries, forms and reports • apply integrity rules for accuracy • use SQL for data retrieval • connect databases to dashboards and reports • manage access and permissions
Outcome 4 Learners should understand: • principles of effective data visualisation and storytelling • techniques for structuring presentations for strategic-level communication • methods for integrating data from multiple sources into visual outputs • customisation and branding for professional presentation standards • best practice for enhancing clarity, impact and audience engagement	Outcome 4 Learners can: • create, customise and deliver compelling business presentations • develop clear, accurate and interactive data visualisations • integrate content from spreadsheets, databases and reports • apply consistent branding and formatting across outputs • communicate insights effectively to support decision making
Outcome 5 Learners should understand: • project planning • risk management • performance management	Outcome 5 Learners can: • plan, monitor and evaluate projects using project management tools • manage budgets, resources, risks and performance measures • facilitate effective team collaboration and communication

Meta-skills

You must give learners opportunities to develop their meta-skills throughout this unit. We have suggested how to incorporate the most relevant ones into the unit content, but you may find other opportunities.

Self-management

This includes focusing, integrity, adapting and initiative. The most relevant are:

- focusing:
 - maintaining accuracy and attention to detail when producing and analysing complex business information
- integrity:
 - presenting information professionally
 - applying ethical standards
 - ensuring data accuracy
- adapting:
 - adjusting outputs and approaches to suit different digital tools, data sources and business requirements
- initiative:
 - applying advanced digital features to streamline processes and improve outcomes

Social intelligence

This includes communicating, feeling, collaborating and leading. The most relevant are:

- communicating:
 - conveying complex insights clearly through professional reports, dashboards, and presentations
- feeling:
 - considering the needs and perspectives of diverse stakeholders when presenting information
- collaborating:
 - using digital platforms and collaborative tools to work with others effectively
- leading:
 - taking responsibility for project tasks
 - guiding peers to meet professional standards

Innovation

This includes curiosity, creativity, sense-making and critical thinking. The most relevant are:

- curiosity:
 - exploring advanced digital tools to identify new ways of working more efficiently
- creativity:
 - designing engaging outputs that influence decision making and improve business communication

- sense-making:
 - interpreting and connecting data to produce meaningful insights in a business context
- critical thinking:
 - evaluating data
 - challenging assumptions
 - selecting appropriate tools to solve business problems

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacies.

Numeracy

Learners develop communication skills by:

- applying advanced spreadsheet functions and data analysis techniques to interpret, model and present numerical information
- using quantitative evidence to support business decision making and evaluate performance outcomes

Communication

Learners develop communication skills by:

- producing professional reports, dashboards and presentations that convey complex information clearly to different audiences
- collaborating effectively with peers and stakeholders
- adapting communication style to suit context and purpose

Digital

Learners develop digital skills by:

- integrating and applying advanced digital tools, including word processing, spreadsheets, databases, presentation, and project management applications
- using automation, collaboration and data visualisation features to streamline workflows and improve operational efficiency

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you should encourage learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

This includes:

- a general understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability
- a general understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- a deeper understanding of subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and values they develop in the next stage of their life

Learners explore how digital tools can support sustainable business practices, such as:

- reducing resource use through automation
- improving efficiency in information management
- applying ethical approaches to data handling

This encourages them to recognise the role of technology in contributing to wider organisational sustainability goals and responsible decision making.

Delivery of unit

This is a mandatory unit in HND Administration Management and Digital Business Technologies. You can deliver it as a stand-alone unit or partially integrate it with elements of the Leading Projects and People Through Change unit.

The notional time for delivery and assessment is 200 hours. The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion. We suggest the following distribution of time, including assessment:

Outcome 1 — use advanced features of word processing and presentation software to design and produce professional business documents (30 hours)

Outcome 2 — apply complex spreadsheet functions and analytical tools to manage, interpret and visualise business data effectively (50 hours)

Outcome 3 — create and optimise sophisticated database systems to support business operations (50 hours)

Outcome 4 — design and deliver business presentations and data visualisations that communicate insights effectively at strategic level (30 hours)

Outcome 5 — use project management software to plan, carry out, monitor and evaluate business projects (40 hours)

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

The content of this unit focuses on developing advanced digital skills that reflect professional workplace demands. Learners gain practical experience in:

- producing and managing complex documents
- analysing and interpreting data
- creating and optimising databases
- designing effective business presentations and visualisations
- planning and managing projects using digital tools

You should focus on integrating applications, automating processes, and the creating outputs that directly support strategic business decision making.

The context for this unit is the digitally enabled workplace where data, information and project management underpin effective business operations. Learners work on tasks and projects that:

- simulate real organisational scenarios
- require them to apply advanced digital tools in an integrated way to:
 - solve problems
 - improve efficiency
 - communicate effectively with different audiences
- encourage them to adopt professional standards of accuracy, ethics and presentation
- develops transferable skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and adaptability

You should also:

- highlight the role of digital applications in supporting sustainable and responsible business practices
- encourage learners to consider efficiency, resource use, and ethical data management as part of their work

Resources

Outcome 1: advanced word processing and document production

- Computer with word processing software capable of advanced formatting, templates, automation and collaboration.
- Sample documents and templates for practice.
- Cloud platforms for co-authoring and document sharing.

Outcome 2: spreadsheet analysis and data management

- Spreadsheet software with pivot tables, data modelling, functions and analysis tools.
- Sample datasets and business scenarios.
- Reference guides for advanced spreadsheet features.

Outcome 3: database design and management

- Database software with query, reporting and integration capabilities.
- Sample datasets to build relational databases.
- Tutorials or guides for database structure and integrity management.

Outcome 4: business presentations and data visualisation

- Presentation and data visualisation tools capable of integrating multiple data sources.
- Sample reports and dashboards for applied exercises.
- Display or projector for practising and giving presentations.

Outcome 5: project planning and management

- Project management software for planning, scheduling and tracking tasks.
- Templates for project plans, resource allocation, and tracking risk and performance.
- Case studies or project briefs to simulate real workplace scenarios.

General resources

- Reliable internet access and cloud-based collaboration tools.
- Reference materials on professional standards, ethical data use, and best practices.
- Assessment briefs, rubrics, and guides for open-book project-based assessments.

Approaches to delivery

Using a learner-centred, practical and project-based approach allows learners to develop advanced digital skills in a workplace-relevant context. You should emphasise the importance of integrating tools and applications rather than teaching them in isolation.

Integrated project model

You should organise the delivery of the unit around a single, realistic business scenario or project that covers all five outcomes. This provides opportunities for learners to create linked outputs — such as professional reports, data dashboards, databases, and project plans — reinforcing how digital applications work together in practice.

Incremental skill development

You should introduce advanced features of each application area progressively, with learners immediately applying these skills within the project context. For example, learners might first explore formatting and structuring documents, then link them with data outputs from spreadsheets and databases.

Active and collaborative learning

Learners should engage in activities such as peer review, group analysis of business problems, and collaborative development of project outputs using cloud-based tools. This helps build both technical competence and meta-skills such as communication, collaboration, and adaptability.

Real-world datasets and case studies

Using authentic business data and case studies allows learners to develop decision-making skills and an appreciation of how digital applications support strategic business functions.

Supported independence

You should provide structured guidance at the outset, gradually reducing support as learners gain confidence, encouraging autonomy and initiative in applying digital solutions.

Embedding literacies and sustainability

You should make explicit links to:

- numeracy (data analysis and modelling)
- communication (professional reporting and presenting)
- digital literacy (effective tool integration)
- sustainability (responsible data management, considering social, economic and environmental impacts)

Flexible delivery approach

You can deliver this unit in-person, online, or in blended formats, with cloud collaboration tools supporting remote participation and assessment.

Approaches to assessment

You should assess this unit using a single integrated open-book project that reflects a realistic business scenario.

Assessment support

You should give learners:

- clear project briefs
- structured timelines
- marking instructions
- guidance detailing the expected professional standard for:
 - formatting
 - clarity
 - accuracy
 - ethical data management

Flexibility

You can contextualise the project to different business functions or industries, but the core requirement must remain the integration of multiple digital tools to address a business problem and support decision making.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You must consider the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Information for learners

Advanced Administration Software Applications (SCQF level 8)

This information explains:

- what the unit is about
- what you should know or be able to do before you start
- what you need to do during the unit
- opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

This unit deepens your theoretical understanding and improves your practical skills in using of a range of software tools.

This unit is mandatory unit in Higher National Diploma (HND) Administration Management and Digital Business Technologies. You can also complete it as a stand-alone unit.

Who is it for?

This unit is particularly suited to learners undertaking programmes in Administration and Business, as well as individuals seeking to strengthen their applied IT proficiency. It is highly relevant for those preparing to enter, or progress within, administrative roles across a variety of sectors, offering a robust foundation for both operational excellence and career advancement.

Before you start the unit, you should have a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding of using digital technologies and basic software applications. It would also be useful for you to have previous experience of navigating common IT tools, interpreting instructions and managing digital files.

What do you learn?

During the unit, you:

- strengthen your problem-solving skills in digital environments by identifying issues, evaluating scenarios, and implementing effective, evidence-based solutions
- learn to apply critical thinking and evidence-based strategies to confidently resolve challenges

What can you do next?

If you complete the unit as part of HND Administration Management and Digital Business Technologies, you can progress to more specialised study, such as a degree in business administration.

In terms of employment, the skills you develop are highly transferable and valued across a wide range of sectors, including public services, corporate administration, customer service, and office management.

The HND helps you:

- get ready for roles that require digital literacy, problem solving and effective communication
- advance your career in administrative and business environments

Meta-skills

Throughout this unit, you develop meta-skills that are useful for the administration and business sector.

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help you adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

Self-management

Meta-skill	What it means for you	In practice
Focusing	Concentrate on what really matters. Analyse information carefully, look for key patterns, and ensure your work is accurate and relevant.	Maintain attention to detail when working with data or business information and present findings clearly and logically.
Integrity	Be honest, ethical and transparent in how you collect, interpret and share information. Always check your data is accurate and your sources are credible.	Present your work professionally, reference properly and ensure that everything you submit is your own and meets ethical standards.
Adapting	Be open to change and willing to adjust how you work as new information, tools or requirements arise.	Use different digital tools or data sources confidently and choose the best approach for the situation.
Initiative	Take responsibility for your own learning and look for ways to make improvements.	Use advanced features or processes independently to save time, solve problems, and improve outcomes without always waiting for instruction.

Social intelligence

Meta-skill	What it means for you	In practice
Communicating	Share information clearly and confidently with others.	Present your insights through professional reports, dashboards, and presentations that are appropriate for your audience.
Feeling	Be aware of others' needs and perspectives, especially when your work affects them.	Consider how your communication and decisions might affect colleagues, clients, or stakeholders.

Meta-skill	What it means for you	In practice
Collaborating	Work well with others to achieve shared goals.	Use online platforms and digital tools to plan, share and review work together efficiently.
Leading	Take ownership of your role within a project and support others to meet high standards.	Guide team members, stay organised, and help maintain professional standards throughout group work.

Innovation

Meta-skill	What it means for you	In practice
Curiosity	Be keen to learn and explore new ideas or tools.	Try out advanced digital functions and explore how they could make your work more effective.
Creativity	Think imaginatively and design work that captures attention or improves understanding.	Use creative approaches to design reports, presentations, or solutions that communicate data and insights effectively.
Sense-making	Turn complex information into something meaningful.	Interpret data and connect insights to explain what it means for a business or organisation.
Critical thinking	Look at information from different angles before making decisions.	Evaluate data and arguments carefully, question assumptions, and choose the best tools to solve problems.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you develop skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

You learn about social, economic and environmental sustainability principles and how they relate to the administration and business sector. You also develop an understanding of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

During this unit, you explore how digital tools can support sustainable business practices, such as

- reducing resource use through automation
- improving efficiency in information management
- applying ethical approaches to data handling

This encourages you to recognise the role of technology in contributing to wider organisational sustainability goals and responsible decision making.

Administrative information

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History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

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