Higher National Qualifications (China)
Internal Assessment Report 2013
Business

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

Centres have faced significant changes this academic session with the introduction of new frameworks and Units. In addition centres and staff have had to become familiar with the SQA's new approach to quality assurance (QA). The experience that they have gained over the past few years has undoubtedly helped to ensure a smooth transition during this period of change. The transition has also been supported by central events held by SQA in Beijing over the past two years.

There was a very good rate of success at qualification verification visits, although the new approach to QA did result in a variety of degrees of confidence, with the majority being 'a high degree of confidence'. Centres generally have a good understanding of the national standards and adapted well to evidencing the criteria in the new approach to QA.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Most of the HN awards containing Business Units have been revised and centres have had to adapt to both the new frameworks and new Units. The success at verification events indicates that assessors and centres have made significant progress, and have attained a degree of confidence that can only come with experience.

As in previous years the majority of centres have used the SQA-produced assessment exemplars which have been created for the new Units. Some centres have continued to create their own versions, and these have been submitted for prior verification, which is strongly recommended. In most of the qualification verification visits staff were found to be well versed in the requirements of the Business Units and their associated standards. In a very small number of cases assessors and Internal Verifiers found it difficult to understand what is expected, and what the appropriate standards are. Centres will have to continue to ensure that all staff and in particular those new to SQA qualifications are given suitable information, guidance and support.

Evidence Requirements

The majority of centres and staff have a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units. There were a small number of instances where staff had misinterpreted the standard and were asked to re-assess candidate evidence, or assess candidates to meet Evidence Requirements that had been missed. Some centres were noted for their good practice in checking to ensure that candidate work had not been plagiarised.

Administration of assessments

In the vast majority of qualification verification visits the centres are reported as organising and assessing candidates in accordance with the requirements set out in the Unit specifications. Many assessments can now be undertaken under open-book out of class conditions, and this brings added risks of plagiarism. Centres need to be alert to this danger and some were noted as making good efforts in checking to ensure authenticity, and one centre undertook oral checks to help ensure authenticity. The continuing security of assessments and control over the conditions of assessment is an area that is essential to safeguard the integrity of the awards in the future. In one visit it was identified that some elements of an assessment exemplar solution had been identified, and this underlines the need for vigilance and security.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates from assessors is crucial in helping them to identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses. Some centres were commended for the level of feedback that they provided candidates, but this was not evident in all centres. Feedback can be time consuming, but good feedback is very valuable and centres are encouraged to work towards greater emphasis on this important means of communication.

The new approach to quality assurance covers a broader range of criteria than the old system and there is evidence that External Verifiers are providing greater guidance through the new approach. The development of the External Verifier role is to be expected as the SQA awards have become firmly established, and the supportive/guidance element of the role is to be encouraged.

Areas of good practice

The SQA awards are now at a stage where centres and staff are in the main familiar with their requirements and standards, and this was often recorded in the good practice section of the verification reports. As the new Units and awards become firmly established, good practice is becoming in effect standard practice. In the future it is likely that more innovative ideas and exceptional examples will be highlighted as good practice. This year some staff were cited as giving excellent feedback which is very important and valuable for candidates.

The use of development plans was highlighted as good practice at several centres, and can be very helpful in providing direction for candidates. Some centres provided excellent additional support for candidates, in addition to excellent teaching and guidance. One centre produced frequently asked questions with answers for Units, to help staff involved in delivery and assessment. Other centres were utilising the internal verification system to improve learning and to identify staff needs, and also using it to support staff mid-semester. It was noted that in some centres the internal verification process has been used as a vehicle to hold meetings where issues and candidate work is discussed on a regular basis, and this is to be encouraged.

Specific areas for improvement

The qualification verification of Business Units identified some areas that require either improvement or continued effort. An area of continuing concern relevant to all SQA centres is the security of assessment exemplars. Whilst work has been undertaken to ensure that assessment exemplars are safeguarded and secured, this has to be an area that continues to be of prime importance where continued vigilance and effort is essential from all centres and staff.

Centres need to ensure that they can evidence all of the criteria that are contained within the new approach to quality assurance. Such areas include the planning for the update of accommodation and resources, and ensuring that candidates have been suitably selected and given clear guidance regarding the planning of their studies.

Continuing checks on plagiarism need to me made, and it was reassuring to read in some reports that this is happening on a regular basis. Checking notes and work prepared out of class is particularly important as plagiarism if unchecked poses a threat to the integrity of the awards.