



**Higher National Qualifications (China)
Internal Assessment Report 2014
Economics**

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in Higher National Qualifications in this subject.

Higher National Units

General comments

Centres have now largely adapted to the new frameworks and Units. The introduction of SQA's approach to quality assurance has also become familiar to most centres; however, there needs to be further work by centres to ensure that the criteria are all evidenced sufficiently. Whilst the experience that centres have gained over the past few years has helped to ensure a transition during this period of change, some centres need to improve in areas such as formative assessment and student guidance. To provide some practical assistance SQA held a central training event in Shanghai in April 2014 and a professional development conference in Beijing in September 2014. It is anticipated that the conference will be an annual event and centres are encouraged to ensure that staff participate in these.

There was a reasonable rate of success at qualification verification visits, with the quality assurance resulting in a variety of confidence ratings. Some centres demonstrated a good understanding of the national standards and adapted well to evidencing the criteria. However, quite a few centres were not able to fully evidence one or more of the criteria, resulting in a lower confidence rating.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Centres have had time to adapt to both the new frameworks and new Units in verification group 258. Staff are, in the main, familiar with the Units and in many cases have correctly identified and applied the expected standards. It is important that centres support new staff to familiarise them with SQA qualifications and for existing staff to continue to keep up-to-date with SQA developments and to cascade information to their colleagues.

The majority of centres have used the SQA assessment exemplars (AEs) / assessment support packs (ASPs) which have been created for the new Units. There have been a number of assessments submitted for prior verification and this has generally been very successful. Often the existing AE/ASP has been adapted to provide a Chinese context that will help learners make the connection between the assessment and the Chinese economy and the wider business environment. Qualification verification reports indicate that, in general, staff understood the requirements of the Economics Units and their associated standards. In a small number of cases staff found it difficult to adapt to the SQA requirements and also to identify the standard expected from the learners. 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

Most centres have a clear understanding of the Evidence Requirements in each of the Units. There were some 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. In some cases candidates had not provided evidence for some requirements but were recorded as having achieved the assessment. It is important that staff study the up-to-date Unit specification each year to ensure they maintain a perspective on not only the standard but also precisely what the candidates are expected to produce to meet the Evidence Requirements. Centres have made efforts to make appropriate distinctions between candidates who are required to re-work some of their responses versus situations that merit a re-do/re-assessment.

Administration of assessments

In the 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. In some in-class assessments candidates are permitted up to 250 words of their own notes and it is important that these notes are submitted along with the learner's responses. A continued effort is required to counter plagiarism and copying work from others. Centres need to raise the issue with the candidates and stress that it is not permitted and that the consequences of such actions can be severe. The use of authenticity sheets that the candidate signs is to be encouraged. Centres need to ensure that information on malpractice and plagiarism are in the handbook given to each student. 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.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates from assessors is crucial in helping candidates identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses. It was noted in a number of reports that this was happening at some but not all centres. The use of 'tutorial sheets' was identified as good practice in several qualification verification reports. These recorded meetings between the tutor and the learner and often identified strengths and weaknesses and what the learner had to do to achieve the Unit. Whilst this approach is time consuming, excellent feedback is very valuable and centres are encouraged to continue this good work or to adopt it if they are not doing so at the moment.

SQA's approach to quality assurance remains challenging and much effort is required by centres to ensure that they fully meet all of the criteria; however, effective internal verification remains a crucial vehicle in helping a centre to prepare for a qualification verification event. It is essential that all staff involved with SQA qualifications are familiar with the quality assurance criteria. At the same time, staff need to continually refresh their knowledge of the standards expected from learners and keep up-to-date in terms of the Units specifications and the AEs/ASPs. There needs to be a greater emphasis on formative assessment to help prepare candidates better for summative assessment. Learning materials should be updated on a regular basis and care needs to be taken not to cover areas that are not part of the Units.

Areas of good practice

The SQA qualifications are at a stage where established centres and staff are, in the main, familiar with their requirements and standards. A commonly cited area of good practice was the use of 'tutorial sheets' recording progress and advice from the tutor to the learner. Some centres used this simple tool most effectively. Other centres were also cited for the excellent feedback that not only identified areas of weakness but also strengths, and gave guidance on how the learners might improve.

As was the case last year, some centres are utilising the internal verification system to improve learning, identify weaknesses or areas of good practice, and to identify staff development needs. Having a proactive internal verification system is a crucial element in helping staff and learners, as well as helping a centre to meet the challenges of a qualification event.

Specific areas for improvement

The qualification verification of Units in verification group 258 identified some areas that require either improvement or continued effort. It was identified that the use of formative assessment to help prepare candidates for summative assessment is not as widespread as it should be. Practice exercises, questioning, revision exercises and mock assessments all help candidates prepare for the summative assessment. An ongoing concern is the security of assessments, which must be kept as secure as possible and is an area of prime importance requiring continued vigilance and effort.

There is a general need for staff and centres to update learning materials and this should be ongoing. Over reliance on SQA materials and packs can lead to apathy and staff should update materials regularly. Care needs to be taken by staff not to overload learners by teaching topics not required in the Units.

Centres need to ensure that they can evidence all of the criteria that are contained within the SQA's approach to quality assurance. The planning for the update of accommodation and resources, ensuring that candidates' needs are matched against the qualification and that staff actively engage in the quality assurance process, both internal and external, are important considerations.

Continuing checks on plagiarism need to be made and, as last year, it was reassuring to read in some reports that centres are checking candidate notes which can be used in Units such as Economic Issues and Economics 1. Plagiarism, if unchecked, poses a threat to the integrity of the awards and the use of authenticity sheets and providing candidates with information on malpractice and plagiarism, is an area that requires further work.