



**Higher National Qualifications (China)
Internal Assessment Report 2015
Business Management and
Business Graded Unit**

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

Higher National Units and Graded Units

This internal assessment report covers Units contained within the verification group Business Management 254, and the following Business Graded Units:

H0J1 34 Business with Accounting: Graded Unit 1 — SCQF level 7

H0J5 34 Business with Human Resource Management: Graded Unit 1 — SCQF level 7

H3P4 34 Global Trade and Business: Graded Unit 1 — SCQF level 7

H0HY 34 Business: Graded Unit 1 — SCQF level 7

H3P5 35 Global Trade and Business: Graded Unit 2 — SCQF level 8

H0J2 35 Business with Accounting: Graded Unit 2 — SCQF level 8

H0J0 35 Business: Graded Unit 2 — SCQF level 8

H0J6 35 Business with Information Technology — SCQF level 8

General comments

Many of the centres are familiar with SQA awards, and have offered SQA qualifications for several years. There has generally been a good appreciation of the requirements of the Units within the verification group that incorporates both Business Management and Graded Units. The Business Management Units are common to a number of Group Awards and are well established. A number of different Graded Units from the different awards were selected for qualification verification with examinations being verified at the central verification event, and projects through visits to centres.

There are still instances where some centres have not been entirely successful at qualification verification and it is important that centres and staff continue to maintain their focus upon the required standards associated with each Unit and SQA requirements.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

Qualification verification events indicated that assessors are, in the main, familiar with the Unit specifications and the assessment exemplars for Business Management subjects and Graded Units. Most centres use the assessment exemplars/ASPs, or an adapted version of them. Some centres adapted Business Management ASPs to give a more appropriate context for the candidates and these were submitted for prior verification. When making adaptations or revisions it is important that centres continue to submit revised assessments to SQA for prior verification. One centre used its own case study where some candidates struggled with the level of language it contained, so care has to be taken when creating stimulus material or new questions so that they can be understood by as many candidates as possible.

It is vital that centres study the Unit specifications to guide them on what must be evidenced and to identify the appropriate standards. In a small number of instances assessors and internal verifiers do find it difficult to understand what is expected, and what the appropriate standards are. This reinforces the importance of standardisation meetings and how these can facilitate good decision making. Records of meetings should be maintained and, where possible, experienced assessors should guide those with less experience. Centres have to invest resources to ensure that all staff, and in particular those new to SQA and those who are part-time, are given suitable information and guidance.

Over the coming year China ASPs (CASPs) are being introduced which will replace some of the existing ASPs. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the up-to-date assessments are being used and the latest version of the Unit specification is also utilised.

Evidence Requirements

Qualification verification visits and the central event were, in the main, positive and supportive and indicate that centres generally have a clear understanding of the evidence requirements in each of the Units. Every year it is important that those involved in internal verification, delivery and assessment continue to refresh themselves of the content of the up-to-date Unit specifications and the standards and evidence required. Centres and staff also need to ensure that there is a transparent and appropriate distinction between candidates who are required to 're-do' of some of their responses versus a situation that merits a full re-assessment.

In the examinations, marks should be awarded for genuine points that are explained/analysed/discussed, etc. It is not sufficient to merely identify points and gain marks without relevant explanations in support of the points identified. Prior to marking scripts it is strongly advised that a markers' meeting takes place so that those involved standardise their approaches to marking and enhance consistency. Such meetings should be recorded to show how decisions are arrived at and how any differences in opinion are resolved. Standardisation meetings should take place prior to assessment, and at the point that assessment decisions are being made.

It is equally important that in marking projects the marks are deserved and can be justified. It was noted that some centres were not making it clear why additional marks had been awarded.

Administration of assessments

The centres are generally well practised at administering assessments, but this will require a continued effort in the future. Another area requiring ongoing attention is in the area of plagiarism, and this may need more vigilance and resourcing. Some centres are now using similarity checkers/plagiarism software to help detect plagiarism.

The continuing security of assessments and control over the conditions of assessment continue to be of essential importance. Where a centre can be shown to be negligent regarding a security breach, repercussions are possible.

Whilst some centres were commended for recording discussion and the basis for decisions, there were indications that some centres need to place more emphasis on internal verification and standardisation. Meetings should be used not only as part of a quality process but also as a mechanism to stimulate discussion, ideas, consistency and confidence thus raising the benefit of the quality process to a higher level.

As in the past, there are still differing approaches on how to prepare candidates for the examination Graded Units. Ideally, centres should focus on examination techniques through the use of practice questions based on practice case studies. Centres are advised that they must not base practice questions on the actual case study that will be used for the examination. Guidance on marking given in the past still stands, such as not using half marks. It is important that assessors ensure that marks are awarded in a transparent manner, and in exams should differentiate between basic content marks and those awarded for development.

For projects, the reasons for awarding additional marks should be clear and based on the criteria for which they have been awarded. Centres must ensure that a candidate has passed each stage of the project before they are allowed to move to complete the subsequent section(s). One centre was cited for conducting internal verification at the end of each stage of the project, which is very thorough.

General feedback

Feedback to candidates from assessors is crucial in helping candidates identify and understand their strengths and weaknesses. Some centres seem to be very good at providing feedback to candidates, and there were many examples in the qualification verification reports where tutor record sheets were maintained. Centres were often commended for the useful and constructive feedback provided. Good feedback is very valuable but is time consuming to create.

For examinations, detailed feedback is less important except where a candidate has to undergo a second paper in which case constructive but critical feedback is essential. For projects, candidates require confirmation that what they are doing is likely to lead them down a path that will enable them to achieve the Unit. Guidance and feedback will not only take place at the end of each stage but reasonable assistance should be ongoing as the assessor acts as the project supervisor.

Areas of good practice

To help provide a clearer picture of good practice the examples cited in the qualification verification reports are bulleted below:

- ◆ Good records of communication between staff and candidates
- ◆ One-to-one support
- ◆ Additional time provided to assessors for individual candidate support
- ◆ Sharing information from training events and conferences with other staff
- ◆ Mentoring new and/or part-time staff
- ◆ Providing constructive and useful feedback
- ◆ Using homework and in-class exercises to prepare candidates for assessments
- ◆ Detailed activity logs for the project
- ◆ Using plagiarism software to check candidate evidence for similarities
- ◆ Organising evidence for qualification verification by cross-referencing it to each of the criteria
- ◆ Including a word count on work such as stages two and three of the project
- ◆ Using Harvard referencing and citations
- ◆ Double-marking and cross-checking work and recording how decisions were arrived at
- ◆ Clearly distinguishing between the first and second markers' marks in the Graded Units

Specific areas for improvement

Whilst many centres were successful at qualification verification, across the verification group a number of recommendations and actions were recorded. These areas require either improvement or continued effort by some centres and are bulleted as follows:

- ◆ Insufficient constructive feedback
- ◆ Not providing evidence for each of the qualification verification criteria
- ◆ Providing too much information for qualification verification
- ◆ Just using internal verification as a simple check list process
- ◆ A lack of information how marking disagreements were resolved and how assessment decisions were standardised
- ◆ A lack of plagiarism checking and not providing sources used
- ◆ Not identifying how additional marks had been gained in the project
- ◆ Maintaining appropriate training opportunities for all staff including those that are new and/or part-time
- ◆ Including part-time staff in quality meetings
- ◆ Excessive amounts of 're-do' when professional judgement would have indicated re-assessment as a more appropriate choice
- ◆ Providing more feedback on how to improve performance
- ◆ Ensuring that only staff authorised to work on SQA courses are used to deliver and assess SQA qualifications
- ◆ To ensure that marks awarded can be justified on the basis of the answers and the quality of the responses

All centres need to regularly remind themselves of potential areas of weakness to help maintain the progress that has been made and to make improvements in the future.