Higher National Qualifications (China)
Internal Assessment Report 2015
Management

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

All centres verified during 2014–15 have a good understanding of the principles of Unit specifications and the standards within them. Centre staff are using support materials and the assessment exemplars (assessment support packs) which help in interpreting and maintaining standards. In addition, most centres had established assessment and internal verification systems which help to ensure that the Units and the execution of the Units are supported.

This report relates to one Unit: F84L 35 Behavioural Skills for Business. The majority of staff are appropriately qualified to support delivery of the Unit and most have undertaken CPD in relation to assessment and internal verification. Where new staff were involved in delivery of the Unit, the majority of centres have in place induction and support systems to help ensure that standards are maintained.

Unit specifications, instruments of assessment and exemplification materials

As indicated above, centres appear to be familiar with the requirements of the Unit specification and the assessment support pack. Their quality assurance systems through verification and standardisation ensure that the current specifications are in use and that assessment instruments are also checked in this regard.

All centres used the associated assessment support pack for the Unit and these were often contained within master files or packs alongside notes of meetings, internal verification records and, in some cases, learning and teaching packs. The creation of these packs helps to maintain standards and makes verification an easier process.

The instruments of assessment provided are well established and fully meet the requirements of the Unit. However, the case studies are set within the context of a UK (Scottish) organisation and this at times creates some additional difficulties for candidates.

Evidence Requirements

Evidence Requirements are clearly stated in the Unit specification and the assessment support pack helps with interpretation of these through the assessment, alternative assessment and assessment solutions.

Verification during this session has highlighted that one of the main issues with the Behavioural Skills for Business Unit in this verification group is ensuring that assessment judgements reflect the SCQF level of the Unit. The Unit is set at SCQF level 8. It is not clear at times whether centres realise the importance of this.

In addition, while marking guidelines are provided these cannot cover every possibility and, as a result, assessors and internal verifiers do not always find it easy to set a suitable standard. This can lead to making more demands on candidates than is warranted by the SCQF level but it can also result in work being accepted which is not fully up to the standard set by the SCQF level attached to the Unit. It can also lead to some inconsistency in assessment judgements — this is particularly the case here where the assessment consists of a number of discrete questions: responses to some questions clearly meet the relevant SCQF level, but responses to others raise doubts as to whether the appropriate level has been achieved.

The requirement for candidates to demonstrate their understanding through interpretation and application of theories and models is present in most if not all of the external verification reports. Candidates often regurgitate models or theories in their responses and often present these in a mechanistic manner without giving full consideration to the case study. Centres must continue to stress to candidates that at SCQF level 8 mere repetition of models/theories is rarely sufficient to pass. Candidates are expected to apply their knowledge of the theory or model to the case study situation and draw conclusions and make recommendations based on their application.

Administration of assessments

The development of the assessment support pack helps to ensure that the assessments are administered in line with the requirements of the Unit specification. This further helps to ensure that candidates generate sufficient evidence of an appropriate standard. The guidance and checklists provided also help assessment decision-making but due to the nature of this assessment there may be merit in centres refining the checklists provided to help with the assessment decision and to enrich the feedback provided to candidates.

Most centres have in place assessment and internal verification procedures which ensure that the Unit specification and the assessment being used are current and appropriate, In addition to these pre-delivery checks there is also evidence of interim verification, which includes in some cases observation of the assessor, as well as final verification based on sound sampling principles. This all helps to ensure that the assessments are properly managed and corrective action is taken where required.

In the majority of cases assessment decisions are supported by assessor feedback which allows the candidate to understand the decision and in some but not all cases these decisions are further supported by detailed internal verifier feedback to the assessor. Feedback is a major part of the assessment and verification process and centres should endeavour to ensure that appropriate feedback is provided to assessors and candidates.

Assessment of the Unit does appear to cause problems in that the majority of candidates fail at the first sitting. This may relate in part to the SCQF level discussed earlier and/or to a lesser extent the UK context in which the case sits.

However, it may be that the manner in which the assessment is administered is a significant contributory factor. The assessment consists of a 1,500–2,000 word report which requires answers to a number of set questions. Nearly all the centres leave the setting and writing of the report to the last few weeks of delivery which end-loads the Unit and perhaps creates undue pressure for candidates. A few centres allow for the submission of drafts which is not without difficulty (see below) but for many it is a straightforward submission for marking. Candidates more often than not fail and in some cases may wait for a complete term for a repeat of the same process for the alternative assessment.

It is possible for the assessment to be issued earlier in the term even in the first few weeks to allow candidates to relate the teaching to the case as they progress. It is also possible to split the report into stages, reflecting the Outcomes, each stage would have its own submission deadline and each stage would be assessed. The normal checks and balances would need to be adhered to and ultimately the assessment would be submitted as one final report but this approach would allow the load to be spread across the teaching term. In addition, such an approach should help the assessor identify those candidates at risk at an earlier stage. This supported by a teaching approach using mini case studies may help overcome the high initial fail rate.

A brief mention note on drafts: while drafts are of assistance there is a danger, and there was evidence of that danger, that they create an additional assessment opportunity which runs counter to the assessment policy of the centre. Candidates who care to submit drafts, and not all do, in a number of cases had two attempts at the case study — the unofficial (draft) attempt and their first attempt.

Those centres that provided report writing support for candidates undertaking this Unit tended to fare better than those that did not. This support included in a number of cases referencing and avoidance of plagiarism. With regard to the latter, centres should continue to be alert to problems of plagiarism particularly with reference to the discussions earlier in this report relating to merely restating theories. Referencing also has a part to play here and in an SCQF level 8 Unit it would be expected that candidates should be able to reference appropriately.

General feedback

As indicated earlier, feedback plays a key part in the assessment and verification procedure enabling candidates to consolidate their knowledge and build on lessons learned. In the main, the feedback from assessors to their candidates was good and did go beyond the relatively straightforward completion of the checklists. A number of centres ran tutorial support sessions which allowed assessors to discuss in detail topics arising in class, individual concerns or assessment feedback. These tutorial support sessions are signs of good practice and are worthy of consideration in those centres where they do not take place.

Common among all the external verification reports was mention of the commitment and enthusiasm of staff involved in the assessment and verification processes. Staff, in general, are keen to learn and develop and many had worked

exceptionally hard to develop the subject and their teaching. In some cases this could have been better captured in centre CPD logs but overall it was good to see a genuine interest in 'getting things right' for their candidates.

One of the enjoyable aspects of conducting external verification visits is the opportunity to meet candidates. Candidates who were interviewed were unanimously positive about their learning experience and the support they had received. The majority were aware of the procedures and policies in place for assessment, 're-dos' and re-assessment and had taken part in an induction programme for the course and the subject.

Areas of good practice

Throughout the reports there were a number of examples of good practice identified which are summarised below:

- ♦ The commitment and conscientiousness of staff involved in assessment and internal verification
- ♦ Good centre processes for assessment and verification which included good examples of assessment, internal verification and standardisation processes
- ♦ Master folder/files containing all the requisite information for assessment and internal verification
- ♦ Tutorial support sessions designed to help with the subject, assessment, report writing and re-assessment where appropriate
- ♦ Report writing support which included instruction on referencing and plagiarism
- ♦ Using mini case studies in teaching to build up the skills required to tackle the assessment case study
- ♦ Good constructive feedback from assessors to candidates which related to the marking guidelines and evidence requirements as well as providing development points for the future

Specific areas for improvement

Overall, external verification confirmed that centres generally deliver Units in this verification group in line with the Unit specification and the assessment support pack. Where there were specific issues pertaining to the centres these were covered in the action points for that visit. As such, centres should be aware of actions they can take to improve matters at a local level.

However, the good practice outlined above may also help centres to think about their practice and consider whether they could make changes which might enhance the delivery, assessment and internal verification of Units in this verification group.

The following list provides some further suggestions which centres may find will enhance their practice:

♦ Through standardisation meetings develop extended marking guidelines reflecting the SCQF level (basing them on the guidelines in the exemplars, where these are being used) to emphasise exactly what would and would not be acceptable in a response. This would:

— make it easier to differentiate more precisely between candidates who had provided an acceptable response and those who had not
— enable candidates requiring remediation to be given a very clear indication of where their response had fallen short of the standard
— contribute to consistency among assessors and in the nature and amount of evidence provided by candidates

♦ Encourage candidates to provide answers at the appropriate level, particularly SCQF level 8 where this is required by the Unit. In part this requires making use of relevant management theory. In responses to case studies at SCQF level 8, describing theory is frequently not necessary and quite often a mere repetition of theory can lead to problems of plagiarism. Candidates can demonstrate their understanding of the theory by their choice of example and the reasons they give to support it. This could involve:

— choosing a suitable theory, approach or technique
— giving a precise example from the case study and
— giving a reasoned justification why the theory/technique was appropriate in this instance

This should help make candidates aware that in a case study at level 8 it is an understanding of the theory that is being sought. This approach can be incorporated in the extended marking guidelines recommended in the first point above.

♦ In a few centres there is a need to ensure through their assessment and verification procedures that assessment decisions are at the appropriate level and that feedback given to candidates is sufficient and appropriate.

♦ Ensure that candidates are given support in report writing skills that includes the requirements for referencing and plagiarism.

♦ Ensure that feedback from assessors to candidates and from internal verifiers to assessors is sufficient to enable continuous improvement of assessment and verification practice.

♦ Develop and capture the continuing professional development practice that is taking place in the CPD logs of assessors and internal verifiers.

♦ While the use of draft submissions is not recommended if they are to be used then clear guidelines must be provided regarding their use.