



**Higher National Qualifications (China)**

**Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017**

**Financial Services**

## Introduction

As a part of the qualification verification process for Financial Services, verification activities were carried out involving 21 centres in China in the academic year 2016–17. The financial services units verified during these activities are as follows:

DE5M 34	Financial Sector: An Introduction
H0BX 34	Personal Financial Services
DE5T 35	Financing International Trade
H0BW 35	Financial Services Regulatory Framework
H9AM 35	Investment
H9NC 35	Pension Provision
H9ND 35	Principles of Insurance
H2F2 35	Personal and Business Lending
H0Y7 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 2
H7VA 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 3

The standard of evidence presented for verification showed a general improvement for a third year and centres are to be congratulated for all their efforts in continuing to make improvements to ensure they meet and then maintain the required standards. All centres had addressed the issues experienced last year in relation to the security of assessment instruments (ASPs, CASPs, and locally-devised assessments). Assessors were also applying much more professional judgement when making assessment decisions, and as a result the overall quality of assessment decision-making had improved, although there were still instances of incorrect decisions being made.

At several centres, verification established a high level of confidence that assessment had been carried out to the correct standard in all the units verified, but other centres continued to present some issues. The root cause of many of these assessment and verification issues was that assessors or internal verifiers were not undertaking sufficient personal development to ensure they had kept up to date with the subject they were assessing/verifying. Whilst they understood the required standards as written in the unit specifications, they did not know the current underpinning legislation, products and services, and so their assessment and verification decisions were not valid. In this report, the impact of this lack of recent knowledge on the verification criteria is highlighted in several of the criteria discussed. If centres could address this one issue, there would be a far lower risk of them not meeting the required standards during financial services verification activities.

## Category 2: Resources

### **Criterion 2.1: Assessors and internal verifiers must be competent to assess and internally verify, in line with the requirements of the qualification.**

In almost all centres, assessors and internal verifiers are still not giving enough attention to maintaining their competence to assess and/or internally verify financial services units.

There are two different types of updating/CPD activity that staff should be completing: keeping up to date with the principles and practices of assessment and verification; and updating their subject-specific knowledge in the units they are involved in teaching, assessing and/or internally verifying.

Centres can access materials to support the first type of CPD on the China website, and also at the annual CPD conference. There was evidence of dissemination of materials from the 2016 CPD conference in some centres, although most centre staff are only signing sheets showing attendance at meetings at the start of a session where the conference content is circulated. Assessors and internal verifiers should be discussing the content of the presentations in their subject groups, and completing the assessment and standardisation activities that are shared at the conference. All of those who attend the start-of-session meetings should be reflecting on what they learned during these activities in their centres, and how they will apply this learning in their assessment/verification practices. All this should be recorded on each individual assessor/verifier's CPD record.

Keeping subject knowledge up to date is the responsibility of every assessor and internal verifier, and in many centres there were issues with the validity of assessment decisions because this had not happened. As an example, changes in how savings and dividends are taxed, and the significantly reduced impact of *uberrimae fidei* since the Consumer Insurance (Disclosure and Representations) Act 2012 and the Insurance Act 2015, meant that in some centres there were problems with the validity of assessment decisions in Graded Unit 2. These could have been avoided if the assessor/internal verifier had completed ongoing subject-specific CPD.

Internal verifiers have to be as diligent with their subject-specific CPD as assessors, otherwise they cannot accurately verify the validity of assessment decisions. Details of the updating of subject-specific knowledge must be recorded on the individual assessor/verifier's CPD record. Failure by internal verifiers to keep up to date led to issues in several centres which are discussed in more detail in 4.2 below.

**Criterion 2.4: There must be evidence of initial and ongoing reviews of assessment environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials.**

All centres are diligent in completing reviews of the equipment and classroom environments, producing very detailed documentation showing completed inventories and reviews. Unfortunately, there is still not enough review of the learning and assessment materials in most centres. The issues that arose as a result of not completing effective reviews of assessment materials are covered in more detail in 4.3 below. Learning materials (teachers' PowerPoint presentations, classroom exercises, content of the student learning guide, etc) should be reviewed and updated every year. In the case of learning guides, teachers should be signposting to candidates any changes to the content of each guide every year, to ensure that candidates are fully aware of, and are using, current products, services and regulations.

## **Category 3: Candidate support**

### **Criterion 3.2: Candidates' development needs and prior achievements (where appropriate) must be matched against the requirements of the award.**

Because of the SQA's IELTS requirements, centres review the English language skills of candidates when they join the HND programme from the foundation year. Most centres offer additional support for candidates with poorer English language skills during the first year of the HND programme.

A few centres have identified that the numeracy skills of candidates cannot be assumed to be at the level required for the HND programme and have introduced numeracy reviews as well. Good practice was also seen in two centres which had developed and introduced an additional support module to help candidates further improve their numeracy and statistical skills, particularly in relation to numerical analysis, which was particularly beneficial during the completion of Graded Unit 3.

### **Criterion 3.3: Candidates must have scheduled contact with their assessor to review their progress and to revise their assessment plans accordingly.**

It was pleasing to identify a significant improvement in the provision of scheduled one-to-one candidate support from previous years. Many centres continue to also offer group tutorials which are based on topics chosen by the assessor or candidates. These are useful activities but should not be seen as a substitute for the scheduled one-to-one contact each candidate must have with their assessors.

Likewise, access to assessors via chat forums or advertised times of availability without appointment is very useful. However, some candidates might be having difficulties and yet feel unable to approach their assessor using these methods. This is where the pre-arranged meeting is invaluable. It was noted that some centres were scheduling all the meetings on the same day, with the assessor completing many back-to-back meetings with students of 10 minutes in length. It is understandable that some assessors said that they found this scheduled contact too intensive, and felt the candidates did not get much out of it. This is more likely to be because of the limited time than the fact that the contact is not on a 'drop-in' basis, and centres who used such a concentrated timetable last time are encouraged to review their methods of scheduling, to allow more time for both the assessor and the candidate in the process.

## **Category 4: Internal assessment and verification**

### **Criterion 4.2: Internal assessment and verification procedures must be implemented to ensure standardisation of assessment.**

All the centres have detailed assessment and verification procedures documented, but some centres had problems implementing the detail of their procedures. Verifiers noted during visits that, whilst most SQA co-ordinators were familiar with the procedures, several internal verifiers were not familiar with their content and were unable to discuss them. Centres should ensure that everyone involved in the assessment and verification of units is familiar with the detail of the relevant procedures and how to implement them.

It was good to see that in some centres, the internal verifiers were completing their verification activities to a higher standard than before, and in particular that there was good evidence of reflective discussions being held between the assessor and internal verifiers. Equally important, good records of these discussions were being written, which will also help future assessors and verifiers understand the basis of previous years' assessment decisions and contribute to future standardisation activities.

There was evidence that most centres were more aware of the three stages of internal verification than they had been in the past. Centres are completing checklists at each stage, although there were several instances where the checklists had been signed off as being complete when there were outstanding items.

The most common difficulties were the absence of a re-assessment instrument (discussed in 4.3 below), and a failure to review the assessment to confirm that the questions and assessment guidelines were still valid, taking account of changes in regulations, products and/or services in the financial services industry.

All assessments (ASPs, CASPs, assessments written by the centre, and assessments borrowed from another centre) must be checked every time they are used. To check the instruments effectively, the assessor and internal verifier have to be up to date in their subject knowledge, as discussed previously, otherwise this criteria will not be met.

Some centres had not ensured that their internal verifiers followed the sampling requirements detailed in their internal verification procedures. This arose because a new unit was being assessed, or a new assessment instrument was being used, or an assessor was assessing the unit at that centre for the first time. Internal verifiers need to be more alert to ensure that they use samples of sufficient size every time, and they should not automatically select the same sample size as in previous years.

**Criterion 4.3: Assessment instruments and methods and their selection and use must be valid, reliable, practicable, equitable and fair.**

All the assessment instruments selected by the centres were valid and were either the SQA produced ASPs/CASPs or centre-devised instruments.

Unfortunately, despite highlighting the issue in previous reports, there are still issues with some centres not ensuring that they have re-assessment instruments in place before the candidates sit their first summative assessments. Several of these centres had noted that they did not have a re-assessment instrument in place during their pre-delivery internal verification review at the commencement of delivering the unit, but then the internal verifier did not take steps to ensure that progress was made to source or write the re-assessment instrument. Centres who opt to write a new assessment instrument have to allow sufficient time for the assessor to do this, for a detailed internal verification review to take place, and then for prior verification to be concluded. A timescale of at least three months from start to finish would be realistic. Candidates have to

have prompt access to re-assessment, and this will not be achieved if a valid re-assessment instrument is not available for use.

Some centres were not taking account of the impact of spring break in their assessment planning. This can lead to unfair access to assessment for candidates. There were three different situations that arose as a result of this flaw in assessment planning, and all centres are advised to review their assessment plans to take whatever steps are necessary to avoid any of these problems.

1. Centres need to try to balance teaching and assessment activities between semester 1 and semester 2. This was an issue for some centres who delayed starting delivery of Graded Unit 3 to the start of semester 2, which did not give candidates enough time to complete research and have feedback on each stage of the project before final submission.

2. There was evidence that some centres were not asking candidates to complete assessment of Graded Unit 2 until late in semester 2 despite the fact the candidates had completed their study of the underpinning units in semester 1. To be fair to the candidates, they should always be assessed as soon as is practically possible after they have completed the study of the relevant unit(s) covered by an assessment.

3. Access to re-assessment should be as soon as is practically possible, and there was evidence presented by some centres that units which had been assessed in December were not being re-assessed until late March. Ideally, if candidates complete their summative assessments in November or early December, and if spring break does not start until the middle of January, re-assessment should be completed before the start of the spring break.

Most centres were now applying much more appropriate professional judgement when making assessment decisions, particularly when deciding whether candidates should retake all or part of an assessment. It was good to see that in almost all centres these decisions no longer depended on the use of mathematical formulae based on the number of questions answered correctly. All centres are reminded they should be basing all assessment decisions (including whether a candidate should retake all or part of an assessment) on their professional judgement, having reviewed the appropriate standards.

**Criterion 4.4: Assessment evidence must be the candidate's own work, generated under SQA's required conditions.**

It is good to be able to report that under this criterion, issues seen in the past appear to have been addressed.

There was a significant improvement in the efforts made by centres to ensure the security of assessment instruments, and it was very pleasing to note after the problems of recent years that in 2016–17 none of the assessment instruments were compromised. It is hoped that this improvement can be maintained in the coming year, and that assessors also continue to take care not to over-direct or over-teach candidates when preparing them for assessments.

In addition, there was also a significant improvement in the number of centres who were presenting evidence that was the candidate's own work, written in the candidate's own words. This was particularly evident in the Graded Unit 3 projects in most centres, although some centres had still not been as alert as they should have been in spotting copied charts and graphs being submitted as the candidate's own work.

**Criterion 4.6: Evidence of candidates' work must be accurately and consistently judged by assessors against SQA's requirements.**

The accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions had also improved in many centres. Assessors were making much better use of their professional judgement to determine if the standards had been met. However, a note of caution has to be made. A few assessors were writing on assessments that they had accepted a response 'by professional judgement', without checking that the standards had been met. Professional judgement does not mean allowing candidates who have not met the standards, particularly as a result of very poor use of English, to pass. Assessors must be fully satisfied that the candidate has demonstrated that they have satisfied the published standards.

Two other problems were also seen in the accuracy of assessment decisions in some centres.

Firstly, out-of-date answers being accepted by assessors. This is due to the teachers/assessors not ensuring that they have updated their own subject-specific knowledge, and has been discussed in detail under 2.1, 2.4 and 4.2 above. Hopefully centres will recognise that this updating issue impacts on four verification criteria, and is a fundamental one to address.

Errors in assessment decision-making are also arising where assessors do not closely read the exact response that the candidate has given. Many assessors mark assessments by underlining key words in the candidate's answer book that match words in the assessment solution. The problem is that this method of annotating assessment encourages assessors to 'skim read' assessments to spot and underline the key words without checking that the context the words are used in and the associated explanations are valid. Centres should impress upon assessors and internal verifiers the importance of closely reading candidates' answers, and should make sure that the assessment plans give them enough time to do this.

**Criterion 4.7: Candidate evidence must be retained in line with SQA requirements.**

All centres retain their evidence for periods well in excess of the SQA requirements.

**Criterion 4.9: Feedback from qualification verifiers must be disseminated to staff and used to inform assessment practice.**

All centres produced attendance lists of staff meetings as evidence that there had been dissemination of the feedback. Centres are then focussing on the arrangements for future verifications, and not reflecting on the lessons learned and the changes that the centre has to make to its teaching, assessment and verification practices. In addition to discussing immediate actions, assessors and internal verifiers should be discussing good practice which has been identified, to see if this can be further enhanced, or extended to other units. Recommendations

should be reviewed and their implementation should be progressed or, if it is not considered appropriate to make the changes suggested, the reasons why should be recorded and be available for future verification events.

Only a few centres were ensuring that subject group meetings were held with the assessors/internal verifiers, to discuss the content of this report (previously called the internal assessment report, or IAR). This feedback should also be used as part of the centre's review processes, as it highlights important areas for development, and shares good practice, both of which, if taken on board, should improve the overall quality of assessment and development activities in the centre.

## **Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers**

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

- ◆ The assessment of all candidates' numeracy skills prior to commencement of their studies.
- ◆ The development and delivery of a statistics module to help candidates analyse their research evidence in Graded Unit 3.

## **Specific areas for development**

The following areas for development were reported during session 2016–17:

- ◆ The completion and documentation of relevant subject-specific CPD by all assessors and internal verifiers for every unit they are involved in delivering, assessing and/or verifying.
- ◆ The annual review and updating of learning materials for each unit, to make alterations based on changes learned about during the subject-specific CPD.
- ◆ Scheduled contact for candidate support should be sufficient to meet the needs of both the assessor and the candidate.
- ◆ All assessment instruments should be reviewed and internally verified every time they are used, and the assessor and internal verifiers should be applying updated subject-specific knowledge in this process.
- ◆ Re-assessment instruments should be in place before the first assessment event is held.
- ◆ The timing of assessment and re-assessment delivery should be reviewed to take account of the date of the spring break holiday.
- ◆ All internal verifiers should be fully aware of the centre's internal verification procedures.
- ◆ The content of this report should be reviewed and discussed by the subject team (that is, everyone involved in the delivery, assessment and verification of financial services units) and changes should be made to centre activities based on the lessons learned.