



Higher National Qualification

Verification Summary Report 2019 (China)

English and Communication

Verification Group 1

Introduction

A new verification model was introduced for session 2018–19. It places greater emphasis on remote verification and has a focus on a limited number of qualification verification criteria as they apply to each verification group. Three units were externally verified by seven external verifiers. Of the 47 verification events, five were visiting and 42 were carried out remotely.

Overall, many areas of good practice were noted. There was an increase in the number of centres carrying out detailed analysis of their candidates' assessment performance and results, demonstrating a real commitment to continuing quality improvement. However, fewer centres were actively engaging in subject-specific CPD. This report presents the key findings, identifies good practice, and suggests areas where centres should strive to make improvements.

The units verified (and occurrences) are as follows:

H8T2 33	Workplace Communication in English (31 occurrences)
H7TK 34	Communication: Business Communication (2 occurrences)
F60A 34	Research Skills (29 occurrences)

This document reports on criteria 2.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6 and 4.9.

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.

The staffing information provided was almost always comprehensive and detailed a range of activities to ensure staff were kept abreast of SQA developments and HN programme requirements. The best CPD records were reflective, with staff contemplating how they planned to make use of their learning. However, some staff did not provide evidence of any CPD in this subject area, despite this being recommended on many occasions during the 2017–18 academic session.

It would be beneficial to see some subject-specific references to CPD relating to this verification group (VG1), such as an annual review of the SQA QVSR, familiarisation with new resources such as Understanding Standards for H8T2 33 and H7TK 34 (https://cn.sqa.org.uk/Tutor_Resources/UnderstandingStandards/UnderstandingStandardsPacks), and opportunities to engage in CPD to further develop assessors' own English skills so they can grow professionally and be able to offer the best possible support to their candidates.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Most centres provided evidence of robust internal assessment and verification procedures through minutes of meetings and/or pro-formas, which demonstrated regular contact between assessors and internal verifiers. In a few centres internal verifiers provided insightful and specific comments to support the assessors and suggested future quality improvements. In some instances, comments were very brief (just a single sentence or list of headings) with very little specific content, so it was difficult to see whether processes were implemented effectively. In a small number of centres, internal verifiers had identified issues with standards, but these had not led to corrective actions.

Many centres used Assessment Summary Records (also referred to as Post Delivery Review forms or Assessor's Reports). These documents provided a reflective and analytical account of the assessment process and performance of candidates in each outcome and were used effectively to create action points.

Almost all centres successfully uploaded required evidence to appropriately labelled folders, though there were occasional errors in labelling and scanning.

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

H8T2 33 Workplace Communication in English and H7TK 34 Communication: Business Communication

In almost all centres, assessment instruments were being used correctly using SQA 2015 and 2016 Assessment Support Packs (ASPs).

In a small number of centres, the assessment conditions for Outcome 1 had been misinterpreted in the following ways:

- ◆ Candidates were not permitted to take any notes or dictionaries into the assessment.
- ◆ Candidates had been restricted to one hour to complete the assessment.
- ◆ Candidates were awarded scores for each question and a pass mark was set by the assessors.
- ◆ Candidates were given multiple attempts with the same reading text (up to four attempts).

This is an open-book assessment without a prescribed time limit. Candidates may take dictionaries and class notes into the assessment, and should be given as much time as is practicable to complete the assessment. Candidates can only be awarded a pass if all the evidence requirements have been met successfully. Scores are not valid.

In a few instances, assessors used the structured Outcome 1 Reading questions for assessment, and then the four generic questions *on the same text* for re-assessment. This is not a valid approach. Candidates were effectively being asked to analyse and evaluate the same text again, resulting in up to four attempts. The alternative questioning approach is simply a different way of presenting the same assessment on the same text.

Re-assessment instruments must use a different reading text and questions — most likely to be taken from the other SQA ASP.

F60A 34 Research Skills

In 75% of the external verification samples selected, Research Skills was assessed as a stand-alone unit using either the SQA ASP or centre-devised assessments that had been prior verified by SQA. It was pleasing to note that some centres are now sharing their prior-verified assessments with other universities. 25% were assessed by integration with graded units using SQA's integrated checklists. Assessors are reminded that it is possible for a candidate to fail to meet the requirements of the graded unit, yet still have done enough to pass Research Skills, and vice versa. Staff should be mindful of this and ensure that candidates who satisfy the evidence requirements are resulted accordingly.

In a few centres, assessment plans stated that just one opportunity for re-working will be given if candidates fail to achieve a Research Skills outcome. After that they were asked to re-assess with a new investigation. However, the focus of this unit is on developing skills, so it is important that candidates are allowed to re-work assessments further if they are not successful after the first re-do. For this unit, a completely new assessment is not practical.

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

In all centres measures were in place to ensure authenticity, though some were more effective than others.

All centres used candidate authenticity declarations. A few centres are using online plagiarism detection services such as Turnitin. This is excellent practice and could be of value to many other centres to deter copying.

There was ample evidence that candidates had been advised of the importance of referencing and citation. However, this was not always checked carefully enough. In some cases, assessors did not notice when candidates had lifted large sections of text from other sources.

Citation was vague or not used at all. Lifting large sections and simply adding a citation at the end of each paragraph is a form of plagiarism. This can be identified by looking for inconsistencies in the style of writing.

The introductions, conclusions and recommendations are obviously written by the candidates. Sentences are usually short and simple (which is fine) with a few grammar or style errors. If the main body of the reports then consist of long, complex and often perfectly constructed

sentences, this is a clear sign that candidates have not used their own words. Candidates must interpret and select relevant information from sources and write in their own words.

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

Most centres were reliably making accurate and consistent assessment judgements, to ensure the integrity of SQA qualifications. In some centres there were issues with particular units and outcomes.

H8T2 33 Workplace Communication in English

Assessment judgements were mostly accurate. Feedback to candidates was usually specific and appropriate to support them prior to re-assessment. Outcome 1 was almost always satisfactory, with appropriate decisions regarding re-do/re-work and re-assessment. Most marking schemes were well developed and being used effectively. In a few cases marking schemes for Outcomes 2 and 3 were brief and unhelpful, just listing evidence requirements.

In some centres there was too much leniency regarding what was considered to be sufficiently accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar for Outcome 2 reports. There were also some problems in using structure to assist clarity and effectiveness as some candidates presented conclusions and recommendations in reports that bore no relationship to the reports' findings.

Outcome 3 assessments were generally satisfactory in most centres. Written records of meetings tended to be of a good standard, but there was sometimes little evidence to support other Outcome 3 evidence requirements, such as use of non-verbal skills to progress group communication. This skill is equally important as the other evidence requirements and cannot be overlooked.

Some assessors' Outcome 3 assessment observation checklists contained brief and repetitive comments. In some of the video evidence provided, the weaker performances were partly due to the unhelpful seating arrangements. A few candidates remained static, just reading scripts and glancing up for a split second without any other animation. A few centres provided excellent examples of candidates sitting around a table, which was more conducive to personal interaction as candidates appeared less nervous and were more likely to interact with each other more naturally. If candidates merely read from scripts they cannot achieve a pass. Those who are listening must appear to be engaged, thereby supporting the speaker. The skills to be more fully developed are:

- ◆ Ideas are presented clearly and coherently;
- ◆ Language, register and tone are used effectively;
- ◆ Responses to the contributions of other progress interaction;
- ◆ Non-verbal skills promote and progress communication.

F60A 34 Research Skills

Most of the work submitted by candidates was of a high standard, though there were sometimes issues around writing with 'effective use of language, register and style'. Assessors must remember that the evidence requirement is set at 1000 words for the final research report. There is no necessity to write reports of 2500 words or more. Over-assessment of this unit penalises those learners who are not as confident with the English language and who do not have the skills at this time to complete an effective investigative report of more than 2500 words. It would be to their advantage to spend the additional time producing shorter and more logical and coherent reports.

In one centre, weaknesses were apparent in candidates' Outcome 1 planning documents which had not been addressed by the assessor during marking. Subsequently some candidates produced weak research reports.

Some centres are still setting assessment tasks that are too challenging in the context of this unit and candidates attempted to use questionnaires with unreasonably large numbers of participants. Some centres have been advised to review their research topics and simplify them (without diluting the evidence requirements) to allow candidates to choose a local topic for easy access to primary sources. Ten questions distributed to 15 to 20 participants is adequate for questionnaires. Centres who have addressed this have seen improvements in their pass rates.

In a few centres, staff had not been sufficiently vigilant in checking for poor citation and plagiarism. Some candidates had copied large sections into their reports. Others wrote conclusions that did not match their findings, and recommendations that did not match any of the content. Centres may wish to consider the use of plagiarism detection software such as Turnitin to check candidates' research reports.

In a small number of centres, drafts of candidate evidence were not retained for standardisation and verification purposes.

H7TK 34 Communication: Business Communication

Both centres selected for external verification of this unit demonstrated leniency in assessing Outcome 2 of this unit for these particular evidence requirements:

- ◆ complex information is selected from relevant sources and conveyed accurately
- ◆ structure is logical coherent and effective
- ◆ spelling punctuation and grammar are consistently accurate
- ◆ reference sources are recorded as appropriate

Several candidates who had originally been awarded a pass had to be asked to do further re-working in order to meet the level 7 standard for writing. Assessors and internal verifiers should make use of the new Understanding Standards resource for this unit to better understand the minimum level required to pass Outcome 2 of this unit.

https://cn.sqa.org.uk/Tutor_Resources/UnderstandingStandards/UnderstandingStandardsPacks

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

All centres demonstrated that they shared feedback from external verification with staff. However, some centres failed to demonstrate how they used the feedback to make future improvements. In about 30% of verification occurrences, centres had not followed up on recommendations made in their reports. These are important suggestions for quality improvement and should be carefully considered. There were some examples where centres made clear improvements and increased candidate pass rates after implementing recommendations.

If centres choose not to implement recommendations, they should record their decision making in their internal verification records.

Centres should note that recommendations and comments relating to H8T2 33 Workplace Communication in English are almost always relevant to H7TK 34 Communication: Business Communication.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2018–19:

- ◆ Reflective CPD records.
- ◆ Regular meetings between assessors and internal verifiers with detailed records.
- ◆ Use of Assessment Summary Records to analyse candidate performance.
- ◆ Sharing prior verified assessment instruments with other centres.
- ◆ Using plagiarism detection services such as Turnitin.
- ◆ Following up recommendations from external verification reports leading to improved results.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2018–19:

General areas for development

- ◆ Subject-specific CPD (relevant to VG1) for all assessors and internal verifiers.
- ◆ More assertive feedback from internal verifiers and creation of action points when issues are identified during internal verification.
- ◆ Detailed minutes to support the effectiveness of internal verification.
- ◆ Assessors and internal verifiers to be more vigilant regarding identifying when candidates have lifted large sections of text without accurate citation.

H8T2 33 Workplace Communication in English and H7TK 34 Communication: Business Communication

- ◆ Outcome 3 evidence should be robust and verifiable. Video evidence of Outcome 3 presentations, more detailed and individualised assessment checklist comments and candidates' notes should all be made available for future external verification.
- ◆ Review assessment conditions for Outcome 1 to ensure they are being applied correctly.
- ◆ Stricter adherence to evidence requirements for Outcome 2 of H8T2 33 and H7TK 34, using SQA Understanding Standards resource for benchmarking.
- ◆ Review candidate preparation for Outcome 3, focusing on development of non-verbal skills to promote interaction.
- ◆ More robust recording of evidence to demonstrate candidates' performance for Outcome 3 meeting or presentation. Video samples to be included in future external verification activity.

F60A 34 Research Skills

- ◆ Taking extra care not to over-assess Research Skills by setting unrealistic expectations.
- ◆ Learners who struggle with their English language are encouraged to limit their report to between 1000 and 1200 words.
- ◆ Limiting questionnaires to 10 questions for 15-20 people as advised by the ASP.

- ◆ Taking care to check structure of candidate reports to ensure conclusions and recommendations are relevant.