Higher National and Graded Unit (China)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2019
Business Management

Verification group: 254

Introduction

The following units were selected for verification:

♦ F84T 34 Managing People and Organisations (SCQF level 7)
♦ F7J7 35 Business Culture and Strategy (SCQF level 8)
♦ H2XK 35 Global Business Organisations (SCQF level 8)
♦ H3MF 34 International Business Environment: Geographical Influences (SCQF level 7)
♦ H0J1 34 Business with Accounting: Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)
♦ H0HY 34 Business: Graded Unit (1 SCQF level 7)
♦ H0J7 34 Business with Human Resources: Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)
♦ H0J2 35 Business with Accounting: Graded Unit 2 (SCQF level 8)
♦ H3P4 34 Global Trade and Business: Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)
♦ H0J8 34 Business with Information Technology: Graded Unit 1 (SCQF level 7)

The following SQA awards were selected for verification:

♦ GE7Y 16 HND Business with Accounting
♦ GG5F 16 HND Global Trade and Business
♦ GE9R 16 HND Financial Services
♦ GE7V 16 HND Business with Human Resource Management
♦ GE7X 16 HND Business
♦ GE80 16 HND Business with Marketing

The verification process changed significantly in academic session 2018–19. We now focus on awards and units within the awards, rather than verifying units across awards. Individual HND awards were selected by SQA and then units within those awards, so reducing the burden for centres. Evidence for the units selected was only required where they were delivered within the awards selected.

Another significant change involved the division of the criteria into 'generic' and 'qualification', with the generic criteria only being remotely verified once for a whole award. The generic criteria are 2.4, 3.2, 3.3, 4.2, 4.4, 4.7 and 4.9. The remote verification of the generic criteria meant that a centre did not have to repetitively submit evidence each time individual units were verified, significantly cutting down the workload for centres and verifiers. The remaining qualification criteria (2.1, 4.3, 4.6 and 4.2 also a generic criterion) were then verified separately, either through visiting or remotely, for each unit selected within the selected awards.

A further important change involved qualification verifiers tackling units from other verification groups during visits and remotely. Those units verified under Business Management 254 group visits that belong to other verification groups are not covered within this report. In addition to the change in approach to qualification verification, visits were scheduled over a two day period with time being set aside to answer questions and provide support for centres.

None of the units selected are new and none have had significant revisions this session. Managing People and Organisations, and Graded Unit 2 units had guidance relating to word counts amended in 2017–18.

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.

As in years past, centre staff are well qualified in terms of academic qualifications and many have a lot of experience in delivering and assessing SQA qualifications. CPD records showed that some staff have formal teaching and internal verification qualifications, but in the main, training has come through CPD events run by SQA and at the centres. A number of staff have themselves gained an HND before continuing their studies. Centres continue to commit resources to training staff and ensuring that they are familiar with their roles and responsibilities. As per the past two years, reports there was evidence of staff passing information from SQA related events back to their centre and to the other staff involved in SQA awards. This is important and SQA rely on staff cascading information and good practice to others who are not able to attend training events. During visiting verification, centres were afforded the opportunity to ask questions and gain support from the verifier, and while some centres took advantage of this opportunity, not all did.

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

Centres were mostly able to provide evidence that they have systems in place to ensure ongoing reviews. These systems included formal cyclical reviews where necessary changes are made to the learning environment and materials etc. The internal verification process covers the checking of assessments and learning materials and again most centres were able to demonstrate that they consider the resources required and that changes are made as necessary. Records of meetings often indicated that staff add to learning materials on a regular basis. The learning guides produced will soon be phased out and so it is vital that centres develop new materials for each subject. In most cases for units in VG 254, centres still use the SQA CASP, but some centres have devised their own assessments for re-assessment and submitted them to SQA for prior verification. Examples of prior verification submissions indicated that centres are developing contextualised assessments for some units. Centres also submitted resource checklists and details of the centre including information on library services and computing facilities etc.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Some centres found it difficult to evidence this criterion remotely. Some did provide details on how candidates are recruited for the HND awards and the entry requirements that they must meet. Candidates were provided with an induction that consisted of different formats and varying lengths of time. Centres submitted induction checklists and programmes as well as candidate handbooks. All candidates have to complete a first year studying English where they must gain a minimum score for IELTS of 4.5 before being able to proceed to the second year. This strengthening of the language entry requirement continues to have a very positive impact on the results of verification events this year. Centres operate their own systems regarding pastoral care often with a student advisor/mentor and these systems were outlined in policy documents and in records of meetings with candidates including individual tutorial records. Centre provided details of timetabled guidance slots and individual tutorial time, with examples of completed records and communications including WeChat. Centres provide access to specialist support services as required.

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

Basic information included timetables and details on how assessors could be contacted outside class times with examples of emails and WeChat were provided. Access to staff can be more difficult when they are employed on a part-time basis, and are often paid for scheduled formal contact time only. During visiting verification it was felt that outside Beijing and Shanghai there was less reliance on part-time staff than in past years. Within the two main cities some staff continue to teach in more than one centre and they have often become very experienced and are sought after. Some centres provided examples of feedback given to candidates as evidence for remote generic verification which varied in length and detail. Some of the feedback and guidance was detailed and very good. Tutorial records showed details of discussions between staff and candidates and indicated an ongoing effort to provide support. Contact and the availability of help and support are critical in helping to improve success rates. A small number of centres found it difficult to evidence the contact and support that they provide. One centre was able to evidence criterion 3.3 remotely, but during visiting it was evident that the level of support required was not being provided and the level of achievement was very poor.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Almost all centres provided an IV policy and completed IV records. There were a small number of instances where elements of the records were missing often either one or more of the three stages, or aspects such as records showing that standardisation was taking place. In the majority of cases there was a noted move towards a much better use of the internal verification process. Records commonly contained a lot of detail with regard to discussions and decisions being made. The records were often supplemented with minutes and assessment summary reports. A new development was the 'Assessor Feedback Summary' which was provided in different formats by a number of centres. This provided evaluative narrative feedback on the delivery and assessment of an individual unit, rather like an annual course report and these examples are certainly examples of good practice. As in recent years the detail of the records was generally very good, and usually a clear indication that standardisation was often taking place as part of the quality process and firmly embedded. The pre-delivery records still tend to take the format of a checklist, but both interim and end sampling records were often detailed. Some records contained explicit actions for future implementation along with timescales and it was relatively common for there to be a link to past verification reports, recommendations and good practice. The incorporation of reviews into the academic cycle and preparatory stages of the next time delivery of courses is very important and is a central theme at the Professional Development Conference being held in August 2019.

In general assessment procedures for the units in VG 254 are well understood with the units being long established. Assessments were mainly conducted in line with the requirements set in the unit specifications although care needs to be taken to ensure that where an assessment should be conducted open-book out of class, that it is not classed as an exam and conducted under more stringent conditions than required.

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

Centres used; in the majority of cases; the SQA devised assessments or in a number of cases, a locally devised version based on the SQA CASP. Often locally devised assessments tend to incorporate more appropriate case study material, which is good practice. Centres creating their own assessments have passed them through the prior verification process which is often used for re-assessment purposes. It is important that questions are varied where a new assessment is created for re-assessment, rather than just being contextualised. The assessment instruments are usually passed through a pre-delivery check, which was recorded in an IV record. This is important as it provides the opportunity for staff to check they are using the correct up-to-date assessment and refresh their ideas about standards and issues involved in assessing the unit. Records indicated that there were no serious issues with assessments and they were recorded as accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair. All centres had the up-to-date unit specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions could be adapted to meet those specific needs, and candidates could usually access specialist support.

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

Centres use a variety of means in determining authenticity of the candidate evidence. The almost universal approach is for the candidate to sign an honesty/authenticity statement that is submitted along with their work. In addition, each centre has a malpractice/plagiarism policy that candidates can access in some form or other so that they are aware of what constitutes plagiarism and the potential consequences. The use of electronic checkers was identified in two reports and they are particularly useful for units such a Managing People and Organisations, and Business Culture and Strategy. It is hoped that the use of electronic checkers will grow in future. There were a modest number of instances where copying or poor referencing were identified and appropriate action taken in line with the centre policy. A continuing recommendation is for the projects and open-book work to have more resources allocated to help improve referencing skills. Some centres have made progress in this area and one held academic integrity and ethics sessions as part of the induction process, in addition to sessions where referencing skills are taught. All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA for these particular units.

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

Centres are generally familiar with the units and the assessments for them within VG 254. The majority of projects were acceptable and the marks and grades tended to be a fair reflection of the work. There were still some instances where the Graded Unit projects were tending towards higher marks than deserved. This was sometimes due to poor expression not being taken into account, or where a contrived format for the projects was being used which reduced the need for thought on the part of the candidates as to how to research the topic chosen. Centres consistently identified on the scripts and marking sheets the criteria for which additional marks were awarded which is what should be done. In Graded Unit 1 examinations, most centres gauged the appropriate standards, but one or two awarded development marks excessively and two centres failed to allocate marks one at a time. Some centres were advised to review marks in the area just below the pass mark as they were being overly harsh in failing candidates with 48%, where on reading the scripts, it was possible sometimes to justify an additional two marks.

Assessors usually provided feedback sometimes on the scripts or using checklists, but the amount and value of the feedback varied. Sometimes it was very detailed and would help candidates improve their responses, while on other occasions it was limited in use. Centres were in most cases familiar with the requirements of the non-graded units in VG 254 and in the majority of cases made suitable assessment decisions.

The evidence from verification records and minutes of meetings indicate that there is a stronger appreciation of the role of discussion in attaining standardisation, which leads to more consistent and appropriate assessment decisions being made. The use of professional judgement and a growing use of the internal verification system as a mechanism for making sound assessment decisions continue to be a positive development.

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

All centres have a retention/data processing policy, and all verified this year provided the required evidence and records as required by SQA. In two cases, modifications were required to define the period evidence and records are retained for and how data is handled and stored. Many centres retain candidate evidence for a longer period than required by SQA. Often retention periods would vary depending on whether an assessment decision had been challenged or not.

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

Centres were mainly able to clearly demonstrate that they have a process in place to ensure the dissemination of feedback from external verification activity. Some centres had a strong communication mechanism in place with a clear link into the internal verification and standardisation process, with some recording verification outcomes clearly in internal verification records or at team meeting minutes. The best examples contained actions being set to help improve delivery and assessment in the next academic session. Qualification verification reports were made available as required, and areas of good practice and recommendations distributed. While information is often recorded and discussed, not all centres made a strong connection between the feedback and taking specific actions to make improvements.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Significant investment in staff development and training.

♦ Centres were very well prepared for visiting and remote verification events.

♦ The quality and detail of feedback provided by some centres was excellent.

♦ Verification feedback for actions and recommendations from all events collated into a single summary report and used during planning the coming academic session.

♦ Centres providing candidates with internships.

♦ Using formal debates to enhance language skills and also holding language contests.

♦ The clear identification of the criteria for which additional marks are being awarded in the projects.

♦ Marking sheets used in Graded Unit examinations that clearly show the basic marks awarded and those awarded for development.

♦ A growing use of internal verification to develop good practice and support arriving at better and more consistent assessment decisions.

♦ Assessor feedback summary reports that provide an evaluative overview of a unit by the assessor.

♦ Providing policy documents and records in electronic format at visiting verification.

♦ The use of electronic checkers to check originality of candidate evidence.

♦ Using the Qualification Verification Summary Report to improve delivery and assessment in the next academic session.

Specific areas for development

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

♦ When centres submit evidence for remote generic verification, there should be sufficient evidence provided for each criterion, but not excessive evidence. It is sufficient to provide examples of feedback, authenticity declarations, etc, rather than providing every single item for every candidate.

♦ Marks in graded units should be appropriate for the work completed. Centres with high proportions of A and B grades should review the candidate's work with care to ensure that the grades are genuinely justified.

♦ Ensuring that when a sample of candidate evidence is submitted for remote verification, that it includes the work that has been internally verified by the centre.

♦ Marks just below the pass mark in graded units should always be reviewed and, where justified, amended.

♦ Some project titles were very general with examples including 'The marketing strategy of XXXXX'. The project outcomes tended to be broad and general with limited relevance. Narrower research topics are better and enable candidates to focus on specific changes in an organisation, arriving at results that are more conclusive than for general projects.

- Some centres continue to use a very rigid structure for projects that contain a SWOT analysis and a format that every candidate follows. Such a rigid and predefined structure limits candidates in arriving at their own decisions on how best to answer their research question.
- To ensure that the assessment conditions are applied and that an open-book out of class assessment is not held as an examination.
- Where legislation is taught, the assessor should check and ensures that they are teaching the up-to-date version of the legislation.
- An ongoing effort is required to encourage the use of a formal recognised referencing system combined with guidance on how this is done.