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Higher National and Graded Unit (China)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2018
Business Management

Introduction

The following units (from Verification Group 254) 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
H0J8 35   Business with Human Resource Management: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
H0J2 35   Business with Accounting: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
H3P5 35   Global Trade and Business: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
H0J0 35   Business: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
H0J6 35   Business with Information Technology: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8

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

There has been a significant amount of verification activity over the 2017–18 session. This year the majority of the activity has been conducted on a remote basis, with evidence being provided in electronic format. All Graded Unit 2 projects and Graded Unit 1 examination evidence has been verified remotely at central events. The non-graded units were largely verified during visits to the centres.

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.

Staff are well qualified in terms of academic qualifications and many now have a strong background of delivering and assessing SQA qualifications. CPD records showed that some staff have formal teaching and internal verification (IV) qualifications, but in the main training has come through CPD events run by SQA and at the centres. In addition, many centres had previously received help and training from the Subject Implementation Managers previously in post. Last year's report noted the positive observation that there was evidence of staff passing information from SQA events back to their centre and to the other staff involved in SQA awards, and this was again observed during visits and in verification records. This is very important and SQA rely on staff cascading information and good practice to others who are not able to attend training events. This criterion was not included in remote verification events.

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

For units verified during visits there was always evidence that centres 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 IV process covers the checking of assessments and learning materials. Records of meetings indicated that there is now a strong culture of staff adding to learning materials on a regular basis. The student learning guides produced for each subject still act as the primary source of information in many centres. However, centres must ensure that any content being used is updated in line with the subject/topic in question to take account of any legal/regulatory requirements (or similar) and take account of current business theories and practice. It was good to see that there are now also significant electronic resources being used. In most cases for units in VG 254, centres used the SQA CASP, but some centres have continued to devise their own assessments for re-assessment and submitted them to SQA for prior verification. This criterion was not included in remote verification events.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

For units verified during visits, centres have used their own selection processes for recruiting candidates who had applied for the HND awards. Those that were successful were provided with an induction that took different formats and lasted varying lengths of time. All candidates have to complete a first year studying English, where they must gain a minimum IELTS score of 4.5. This strengthening of the language entry requirement has had a very positive impact on the results of verification events this year. Many centres have invested heavily in trying to improve the language ability of the candidates and this does make a big difference. Centres operate their own systems regarding pastoral care, often with a student advisor/mentor. In some centres there were regular timetabled guidance slots and most have individual tutorial time. Centres provide access to specialist support services as required. This criterion was not included in remote verification events.

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

For units verified during visits, it was clear that there are timetabled formal slots for the units within VG 254. Assessors could be contacted outwith class times, often by e-mail and WeChat, but sometimes were available at their staff base as well. Access to staff can be more difficult when staff are employed on a part-time basis, and are often paid for scheduled formal contact time only. Some staff work at a number of different centres, but the feeling from the verification team was that there has been an increase in permanent staffing compared to past years. Candidates were sometimes provided with verbal feedback and often with written feedback that 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 a good ongoing effort to provide support. Contact and the availability of help and support are critical in helping to improve candidate success rates. There is a definite cost for such support, but there are benefits being gained in return. This criterion was not included in remote verification events.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres provided an IV policy and completed IV records. There was a noted move towards an improved use of IV processes. 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. The detail of the records was very good at indicating that standardisation is often taking place as part of an ongoing process and is now firmly embedded. The pre-delivery records still tend to be mainly 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. Centres have made a lot of progress in using the IV system as a quality check, but also as a means of supporting staff.

Assessment procedures for the units in VG 254 are well understood with the units being long established. Assessments were conducted in line with the requirements set in the unit specifications.

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

In the majority of cases centres used the SQA devised assessments or, in a number of cases, a locally devised version based on the SQA CASP. Many centres have created their own set of assessments and passed them through the prior verification process. The locally devised assessments are often used for re-assessment purposes. The assessment instruments almost without exception were passed through a pre-delivery check, which was recorded in an IV record. All records showed that there were no serious issues with assessments and they were recorded as being accepted as 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 usually could 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 not frequent, but their use is growing and they are particularly useful for units such a Managing People and Organisations, and Business Culture and Strategy. There was a modest number of instances where copying or poor referencing was identified and appropriate action taken. A common recommendation for the projects and open-book work is for more resources to be allocated to help improve referencing skills using a recognised format such as Harvard. All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions required 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 familiar with the units within VG 254 and their assessments. The majority of projects were generally good 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 was strictly deserved. This was sometimes due to poor expression not being taken into account, or where a contrived format was used for the projects, 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.

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 of limited use. Centres were familiar with the requirements of the non-graded units in VG 254, and in the majority of cases made suitable assessment decisions.

Importantly, there was a lot of evidence from verification records and minutes of assessment meetings that there is a much stronger approach towards standardisation. The use of professional judgement and a growing use of the IV system as a mechanism for making good assessment decisions were very positive changes.

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

All centres have a retention/data processing policy, and all those verified this year provided the evidence and records required by SQA. Many centres retain candidate evidence longer than required by SQA. Often retention periods would vary depending on whether an assessment decision had been challenged or not. All centres recognised the need for security during storage.

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

For units where visits took place, centres demonstrated they have a process in place to ensure dissemination of feedback from external verification activity (as noted earlier, graded units were not included in visits this year). At some centres, this was recorded clearly in IV records or team meeting minutes. Qualification verification (QV) reports were made available as required, and areas of good practice and recommendations were distributed. In each centre, there is provision within the IV system to nominate actions with timescales resulting from a QV event. While information is often recorded and discussed, in a very small number of cases problems previously identified persisted. This criterion was not included in remote verification events.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2017–18:

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

♦ There was strong evidence of the cascading of information from SQA sponsored events such as the Professional Development Conference, to staff at their centres who had been unable to attend these events.

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

♦ Centres sometimes refined the suggested solutions, which can be useful particularly where more than one assessor is involved.

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

♦ There is a growing use of IV as a means of developing good practice and being supportive in arriving at assessment decisions.

♦ One centre recorded tutor sessions, which could then be accessed online.

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2017–18:

♦ Many of the project titles were very general, with examples often including 'The marketing strategy of XXX'. Very little tends to come out of projects that have very broad and general titles. Narrower research topics would be better, and should enable candidates to produce results that are more conclusive.

♦ There must be primary and secondary research conducted in the projects.

♦ Some project objectives were very general and likely to lead to the collection of general and not particularly useful information. These instances would benefit from the objectives being more precise.

♦ Some pieces of candidate work in all units in VG 254 were simply excessively long. The danger is that candidates are rewarded for excessive length when in future years at degree level they will be penalised for exceeding the margins around the word counts.

♦ Some centres 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.

♦ An activity log is a personal record of the work carried out by the candidate during the first two stages of the project, and it is mandatory. The records are often simply about what a candidate did and often lacked reflection on what worked well or not.

♦ There needs to be a continued effort to encourage the use of a formal recognised referencing system, combined with guidance on how this is used.