



Higher National Diploma/Advanced Diploma China

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2019

Financial Services

Verification group: 262

Introduction

As a part of the qualifications verification process for Financial Services, 49 verification events were carried out involving 17 centres in China in the academic year 2018–19. This report covers all verification completed either as a result of a verification visit or remote verification. For the first time, it reflects the revised approach to external verification in China with generic criteria being reviewed separately to unit verification.

The report also includes references to verification of the revised units which are in the course of being implemented. Three centres had commenced using these units and four verification events covered them.

The Financial Services units verified during these activities are as follows:

Existing units

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
H0Y6 34	Financial Services Graded Unit 1
H0Y7 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 2
H7VA 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 3

Revised units

HY92 34	Financial Sector: An Introduction
HY93 35	Financial Services: International Transactions
HY94 35	Financial Services Regulatory Framework
J01T 34	Financial Services Graded Unit 1

The standard of evidence presented for verification did not show the same growth in overall improvement seen in recent years. While this was disappointing, it was good to see that several centres which had experienced issues in the past had changed their approaches to assessment and verification and had achieved outcomes of high confidence as a result.

Conversely, some centres which had presented satisfactory evidence for several previous years had issues this year. In these centres, the attention given to internal verification was not as robust as it had been previously, and this gave rise to issues.

Another issue that has emerged this year is consistency. While the centres were able to produce valid evidence of the application of their processes for one unit, it was found that processes were not applied, or were applied in a much less robust way, when verifying another unit in the same centre.

It was pleasing to note that every centre which delivered the new units achieved outcomes of high confidence, having successfully mastered the requirements of the new standards and subject content.

As ever, there continue to be issues with the level of attention being given to the updating of subject-specific knowledge by assessors and internal verifiers. For the fourth year, this report highlights how this lack of recent subject-specific knowledge impacted on the validity of evidence in several of the criteria. Once again, centres must address and resolve this issue, because until they do so, despite all their other efforts in assessment and verification, the outcome of their verification event will not be one of high confidence.

It is hoped that centres take on board the comments in this report and reflect on the development areas highlighted. In addition, any centre transitioning to the new units in 2019–20 must give sufficient attention to ensuring that they fully understand the implications of all the changes. Teaching approaches and content, and plans for assessment will need to change. In many instances this will require those involved in teaching, assessing and internal verifying to ensure they have up-to-date subject knowledge.

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.

No apology is made for the fact that many of the comments made in previous years are repeated here. Most centres are not taking sufficient steps to ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers complete appropriate continuing professional development (CPD) activities every year in every subject they assess or verify. In particular, it was often found that internal verifiers were not completing CPD for every subject they were verifying. This means that the internal verification activity becomes ineffective, as valid comments cannot be made on the accuracy of proposed assessment instruments and the subsequent assessment decisions.

The lack of updating of subject-specific knowledge was particularly evident in units that were impacted by changes in income taxation rules and rates.

Many assessors and internal verifiers who did complete subject-specific development to update their knowledge evidenced this by submitting extensive lists of websites they had reviewed but they did not give any details of how they applied this in teaching, assessing and/or internal verifying. Unfortunately, the authenticity of these lists was at times debatable because out-of-date knowledge (eg old tax rates) was then used in either assessment or internal verification, after their CPD record had indicated otherwise (eg review of HMRC website).

However, there were also examples of very good practice for this criterion in a few centres. In these centres the CPD records covered not only the content of the CPD and what was learned, but also the further action plan to implement the learning in the teaching, assessment and/or verification of the unit. In one centre, this was taken further, with CPD being a standing agenda item in all meetings (both whole team meetings and meetings between assessor and internal verifier) where learning was shared and checks made to ensure all units affected by the change were identified and relevant actions taken in all the units. This ensures that there is maximum benefit from all development activities, and is something all centres should adopt.

Centres are reminded that assessors and internal verifiers will have to pay particular attention to ensuring that relevant CPD is completed by anyone teaching, assessing or internally verifying the revised units: Financial Services: An Introduction, Financial Services Regulatory Framework and Financial Services: International Transactions (which replaces Financing International Trade). There is new content in each of these units and everyone involved will have to update their subject knowledge. If not, this is likely to lead to problems with the delivery of these units.

Until every assessor and internal verifier accepts that they are responsible for completing subject-specific CPD and applying their newly-acquired knowledge to the teaching, assessment and internal verification of units, there are going to continue to be problems with the quality of assessment and verification decisions. This is something centres can easily address with appropriate monitoring of records and holding regular discussions between course team members to share learning and agree how it will be applied in the centre.

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

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities.

All centres complete some reviews, but in some instances these did not cover all the elements of the criterion. Reviews must cover all five elements — environments; equipment; and reference, learning and assessment materials. They also have to be completed by competent persons. For every unit being delivered, there has to be evidence that reference, learning and assessment materials have been reviewed by someone who has knowledge of the unit.

Two other problems were seen in several centres. Firstly, PowerPoint materials and student learning guides are not being included in the material reviews. Before delivering an award, the learning materials of every unit should be reviewed by the assessor and internal verifier. The reviewers should apply any recently-acquired knowledge from their CPD to this activity. All updates should be identified, documented and actioned.

Actioning updates is the second problem. Many centres produced a number of checklists showing that reviews had been completed, but there was no indication when actions were identified as being required, or that they were actually seen through to their conclusion. For example, centres were identifying that changes were required to assessments to take account of new legislation or taxation rates, but the learning materials submitted as evidence still had old legislation and tax rates.

One centre evidenced good practice in how they addressed reviews. They set up an internal verifier group, with assessors, internal verifiers, co-ordinators and the centre director as members. The group is responsible for all review activities covering all aspects of the delivery of the diploma. This level of discussion and co-ordination ensures the centre is able to react to any changes, and that everyone affected by a change is involved in seeing agreed actions through to their conclusion. Setting up a group like this is something all centres should consider.

Good practice was also seen in a few centres where candidate feedback from end of year surveys was used to inform the reviews. Other centres completed surveys but did not seem to make use of the evidence gathered. Feedback from candidates can be a very good indicator of when reference or learning materials need to be revised to better prepare them for assessment.

Centres are reminded that when they commence delivery of the three revised units — Financial Services: An Introduction, Financial Services Regulatory Framework and Financial Services: International Transactions (which replaces Financing International Trade) — all their learning and formative assessment materials will have to be revised as their materials for the previous units will not prepare learners for the assessments they will have to complete. Overlooking this important review is likely to lead to problems with effectively evidencing compliance with several verification criteria.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities.

SQA have prescribed IELTS standards for candidates, and as well as confirming all leaving the foundation year meet this requirement, all centres offer additional support to candidates whose English is weaker.

Most centres are now using personal development plans to encourage candidates to identify their prior achievements and development needs, and to set objectives to address those needs with support from the centre. Unfortunately, in several centres there was no evidence that these plans were reviewed. Where they were reviewed, the level of review by assessors was very variable within centres — in one unit, an assessor would note items and highlight what support they will give the candidate, whereas another assessor would make no comment. It should be clear on all the assessments of development needs that all relevant teachers and assessors are aware of the development needs of every candidate.

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

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities.

Almost all centres ensured candidates had scheduled one-to-one contact with their assessor at least once a semester. However, in several instances these sessions were focused on the candidate answering a question set by the assessor, which should not be the focus of the reviews.

Some centres are also still giving insufficient time to these reviews by holding a large number of back-to-back meetings with a short time of up to 10 minutes allocated to each candidate. It is far better practice, as was seen in other centres, to spread these meetings over a number of weeks, with the assessor seeing fewer candidates in each time block allocated.

Unfortunately, this is another criterion where there was inconsistency within centres, both in terms of how the contact was scheduled and the level of detail recorded by the assessor about the contact meeting. Centres need not only to define their processes but also to check that these are being applied in full by every assessor. As a minimum, the assessor should document the date and time of the review meeting and what was agreed with the candidate.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Unfortunately, there was an overall decline in the standard of internal verification and standardisation activities this year. Too often, internal verification was being treated as a paper audit, simply to tick a box for the external verifier, rather than as an activity that is central to continuous improvement and enhancement of the skills of all involved in the delivery and assessment of a unit.

However, this incorrect focus was not an issue in every centre. In some centres the standard of internal verification was excellent, with very good records that evidenced frequent communication between the assessor(s) and internal verifier(s). These records are of value to all involved in the assessment process, not only in the year of delivery but also in future years. They can support new assessor training as well as provide reference points in future standardisation discussions.

Examples of good practice included a few centres which had taken the time to reflect on the effectiveness of the delivery of the assessment process after they had completed all the internal verification sampling and made centre development plans. The centres that demonstrate good practice have unique reflective reports for each event, and show evidence of reflecting on the findings and determining next steps. For example, one centre included evidence of how they had altered the teaching timetable to address issues identified. Unfortunately, some internal verifiers elsewhere completed reviews which were often word for word identical to what they said elsewhere, either in other units or other centres. This is not effective internal verification.

A second example of good practice was in a centre where part of their standard pre-delivery internal verification procedure for every unit was for the assessor and internal verifier to review all the Qualification Verification Reports for Financial Services for the previous year, and the annual Qualification Verification Summary Report for diploma units. They collated all recommendations and then applied those relevant to their assessment activities for the year.

These examples of good practice were rare, but they would be very straightforward for centres to implement. In many centres, there is still not enough attention paid to internal verification.

There are more areas of particular concern than of good practice for this criterion.

Firstly, during pre-delivery internal verification, checklists are ticked showing everything is in order, and there is no note of any discussions or standardisation, when in fact there are issues such as the absence of a re-assessment instrument, or the assessment instrument solutions are out of date. Where assessors and internal verifiers in centres take time to consider all aspects pre-delivery, and follow through all the actions they identify as necessary, they generally progress to having a successful external verification.

Secondly, there has been a decline in the standards of internal verification completed immediately post-assessment in several centres. In some centres it was identified that the

number of assessments sampled was below the sample size required by the centre's own internal verification policies. Centres need to pay particular care when they are using a new assessment instrument, as policies usually require a larger sample to be internally verified in such cases — they cannot simply use the same sample level as in previous years. In addition, the standardisation activities should be more detailed, because there are likely to be far more areas requiring discussion as the assessor and internal verifier will be unfamiliar with the assessment instrument.

Even where the correct number of assessments was sampled, problems highlighted last year were still seen, and the comments of the previous report are repeated again.

In several centres there was again no indication on the candidates' assessments that the internal verifier had reviewed the assessment, although their summary checklists indicated they had. Internal verifiers should, as a minimum, be initialling every candidate assessment checklist that they review. In addition, their report should include details of their findings on each candidate.

It is extremely unlikely that, over a sample of assessments, an internal verifier will have no issues with any question in any assessment. When a sample has 'agreed' or 'no issues' entered against every candidate across the sample, this is a potential indicator that the verification has been superficial. An indication by the internal verifier that an assessor needs to reflect again on their assessment decision in a question should not be taken as a criticism of the assessor. It highlights that there can be more than one perspective on whether the standards required have been met. Where good practice was seen, it came from centres where those differences of views were noted and there was a record of joint discussions between the assessor and internal verifier showing the questions where some reflection was needed, and the decisions reached. These records also form very useful standardisation records for subsequent year's assessment decisions.

There should also be clear recording of any interpretation of decisions on whether a candidate be allowed redo, or whether they have to start a new re-assessment. This issue is discussed further in Criterion 4.3.

In several centres there was also an issue with the consistency of internal verification activities and documentation within the centres. In these centres, some internal verifiers were conducting excellent activities with appropriate documentation, and yet others in the same centre were using generic reports with identical content across several units or different centres they worked in. Centre co-ordinators need to look at how they standardise the implementation of their internal verification policies and the quality of the activities completed.

There continue to be issues with the subject knowledge of internal verifiers (discussed in Criterion 2.1), where they are unable to identify either out-of-date assessment instruments or errors in assessment decisions. This was seen particularly in the unit Personal and Business Lending (H2FH 35) this year.

It is imperative that enough time and attention are given to internal verification in every centre. Several centres with larger numbers of candidates have shown they can consistently conduct effective internal verification, so it is hoped all centres can meet this requirement.

Centres are reminded that when they start delivering the new units, they will have to devote more time to internal verification activities during the introductory year. This will include having to conduct detailed standardisation activities to ensure all assessors understand the new standards, and sampling a higher number of candidate assessments in line with centre policies for new assessments.

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 either the SQA CASPs or centre-devised instruments that had already been prior verified. Many centres had also taken appropriate steps to source re-assessment instruments in a timely manner.

There continued to be two problems with the selection of assessment instruments. Firstly, several centres had not taken appropriate steps to check that all the content of the instrument (both questions and solutions) was up to date, and reflected current products, services, legislation and taxation. This was another indication of inadequate CPD.

Secondly, while several centres had been proactive in either sourcing or developing re-assessment instruments, this did not happen in every centre. There had been improvement on this issue in previous years, but this year too many centres identified that an instrument was required, or even ticked that one was in place at pre-delivery internal verification, but then provided no evidence of such an instrument during external verification. There is also inconsistency on this in some centres, where some assessors and internal verifiers are diligent, while others ignore the matter — SQA co-ordinators should be monitoring this issue for every unit. Centres must always work on the basis that they will need a re-assessment instrument for every unit they deliver and take steps to either source or develop one early in the semester. They should not ignore this issue in the hope that an instrument will not be needed. It is not fair assessment if candidates are unable to complete re-assessment at the right time for them because the centre does not have a re-assessment instrument.

Unfortunately, an old issue reappeared relating to the use of assessment instruments. Several centres went back to using a mathematical formula to determine whether a candidate should be given an opportunity to redo part of an assessment or have to complete a re-assessment instrument. This happened when centre policies had been correctly amended to remove reference to mathematical percentages. Centres must ensure that all assessors and internal verifiers are aware that decisions on redo/re-assessment have to be taken using professional judgement. Good practice was seen in some centres, with detailed internal verification records being made of the rationale for all decisions. In addition to evidencing the reasons for the current year, this also gives a benchmark for future years.

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

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities.

It was good to see that for the second year running, there were no issues identified with the security of assessment instruments.

Unfortunately, after no issues last year, instances of over-teaching returned this year in Personal and Business Lending (H2FH). From a review of the CPD of the teachers/assessors involved, it was identified in each instance that there was no work experience relating to the unit and no reading or research as an alternative. The problem is arising in the content which has been changed from the previous unit. Those teaching the unit have to develop their understanding of all the content of the unit, and this has to extend beyond the content of solutions in the ASP, which should never be used as teaching material.

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

Overall, the accuracy and consistency of assessment decisions maintained the standards of last year. Most assessors are using their professional judgement effectively to determine if the standards had been met. There was less evidence of overgenerous application of professional judgement this year, and generally the recording of justifications for decisions has improved.

There was no evidence of inconsistency in assessment decisions in centres.

However, some centres did continue to have issues in making accurate assessment decisions, particularly in Personal and Business Lending (HF2H). In this unit, some assessors continue to give candidates credit for knowledge recall, whereas the requirement is for analysis based on the information included in the case study. For example, comments about the outcomes of ratio calculations have to take into account information from the case study that might explain some of the reasons for the changes. Too often responses would take a view that there had to be a problem as a ratio was increasing or decreasing, when in fact there was a clear reason for this in the case study and there were in fact no problems. Where the assessment asks candidates to say what questions they would ask a customer to assist in making a lending decision, the questions have to be relevant to the scenario, not a list of generic questions, and they should not be seeking information that is already included in the case study. For example, if it is already clear a company has only one customer, a question about how many customers they have is irrelevant — what is needed is a question about what might happen if they lose that customer.

The other unit where accuracy of assessment decisions continued to be an issue was Graded Unit 2 (H0Y7). Some centres were asked to re-mark the assessments — in every case the problem was that the assessors' knowledge of income tax was out of date, and incorrect candidate responses had been accepted. Assessors have to ensure they have current subject knowledge in order to make valid assessment decisions.

Almost all assessors are giving candidates feedback on their assessment, although too many concentrate only on the candidate's English. While these comments are valid, there should also be comment on the subject content of the assessment. A few assessors have been making comments about the candidate's behaviour in class in the feedback. This is not appropriate, as such matters should have been discussed during a scheduled or additional one-to-one meeting between the assessor and the candidate.

In some centres where the candidates submit their evidence electronically, good use is made of the comments function, with assessors typing their feedback on the candidate script. Internal verifiers were also annotating comments by this method. More candidates will be able to submit their assessments electronically when a centre introduces the new units, and consideration of how to record feedback should be part of the implementation discussions within a centre.

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

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities. 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.

This criterion was reviewed during the review of generic criteria which was completed as part of the remote verification activities.

Most centres have policies that include the SQA co-ordinator being responsible for the dissemination of feedback to staff. However, there is only limited evidence that these reports have been used to inform future assessment practice.

Good practice was seen from some centres where they had reviewed all their SQA reports at a minuted team meeting at the start of the semester. What set these centres off from the rest was that these minutes included plans to implement changes, with people named as being responsible for ensuring these changes are completed.

Visiting verifiers reported that very few assessors and internal verifiers they met had seen the previous year's copy of this report. This is very disappointing. All centres should ensure that everyone involved in teaching, assessment and verification reads the relevant reports. In addition, there should be discussion of good practice identified elsewhere which could be applied in the centre, and reflection on the possible need to address areas listed as in need of development.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

- ◆ Regular meetings to review the impact of what has been learned in CPD on the teaching, assessment and internal verification of units
- ◆ The establishment of a group to manage the review process (Criterion 2.4) ensuring all actions are completed
- ◆ The development and implementation of action plans to improve the future delivery of assessment based on lessons learned during internal verification
- ◆ Reflection on the areas for development highlighted in the previous year's QVSR during the pre-delivery internal verification meeting and implementing changes in the centre as a result
- ◆ The identification, development/updating of assessment instruments being completed before December
- ◆ The use of online comment functions by assessors and internal verifiers when reviewing electronically submitted assessments
- ◆ People are named in action plans as being responsible for ensuring that specific changes are completed

Specific areas for development

The following area for development was reported during session 2018–19:

- ◆ Ensure consistency in the application of the centre's process in all units being delivered
- ◆ CPD has to be completed by everyone involved in teaching, assessing and internally verifying a unit, and the learning applied
- ◆ Use candidate feedback to inform the review of reference and learning materials
- ◆ Ensure the records of scheduled contact between candidates and assessors are completed fully and consistently by all teachers/assessors
- ◆ Ensure sufficient time is allocated to internal verification, that records are comprehensive and unique to the unit being reviewed, and that all actions identified at each stage are followed through
- ◆ Ensure consistency of internal verification activities and completion of documentation within the centre
- ◆ Ensure there are valid re-assessment instruments available for every unit at least two months prior to the delivery of the assessment
- ◆ Ensure the rationale for every decision regarding redo/re-assessment based on professional judgement is documented
- ◆ Ensure assessors and internal verifiers fully understand the standards for the unit Personal and Business Lending (H2FH)
- ◆ Follow up on the feedback from qualification verifiers by developing plans to implement agreed changes
- ◆ Make use of the guidance in this report