



**Higher National Diploma / SQA Advanced Diploma China
Qualification Verification Summary Report 2021**

Financial Services

Verification group number: 262

Introduction

As a part of the qualifications verification process for Financial Services, 20 verification events were carried out involving 10 centres in China in the academic year 2020–21. There was no in-country external verification activity. All external verification was completed either remotely or virtually. The review of the generic verification criteria was completed remotely and separate to unit verification. The external verification of the units was completed as virtual verification with feedback being given to the centres via Microsoft Teams.

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

J01W 47	Financial Sector: An Introduction
HP17 47	Personal Financial Services
HY94 35	Financial Services Regulatory Framework
HP1F 48	Principles of Insurance
H2F2 35	Personal and Business Lending
J01T 34	Financial Services Graded Unit 1
J01V 35	Financial Services Graded Unit 2

Centres in China delivered the Advanced Diploma award in 2020–21 with similar constraints to that experienced by centres in the UK. The candidate assessment evidence was gathered from a combination of remote and face-to-face activities. Assessors and internal verifiers also worked together remotely rather than in person for part of the session. All this placed some challenges on the candidates, assessors and internal verifiers and it is pleasing to note that, despite this, the standard of evidence presented for verification was generally higher than in previous years. Although instances of non-compliance were identified, these events were much less frequent than in the past.

As ever, there continues to be issues with the level of attention being given to the updating of subject-specific knowledge by assessors and internal verifiers. Yet again, this report highlights how this lack of recent subject-specific knowledge impacted on the validity of evidence in some centres. Resolving this issue is something that centres should address because until they do so, despite all their other efforts in assessment and verification, the outcome of their verification event may not be one of high confidence.

There was a recurring theme when issues were found with the evidence submitted for the generic criteria — centres were forgetting to upload all the documents available to them that would evidence compliance with the criteria. Whilst it was good that action plans were completed very quickly with the submission of the missing document(s), it was unfortunate that simple errors meant the centres were not showing themselves in their best light. It is recommended centres prepare more detailed checklists to use when uploading their evidence and that some additional checking is made in the centre by other staff to help the co-ordinator in this matter.

It is hoped that centres take onboard the comments in this report and reflect on the development areas highlighted.

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.

Most centres are still 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 internally verify. There is a particular problem with the CPD of internal verifiers, many are doing some CPD but not necessarily in the subject matter of the units they are verifying. If the internal verifier is not up to date with their subject knowledge, the internal verification activity can be ineffective and non-compliant as errors in assessment solutions or assessment decisions will not be identified due to this lack of updated knowledge.

Many assessors and internal verifiers who did complete subject-specific development to update their knowledge continue to evidence this by submitting extensive lists of websites they had reviewed but they did not give any details of how they applied what they learned in their teaching, assessment and/or internal verification activities. Reading to update knowledge is only the first stage of completing CPD. There are three more important stages that follow on from reading. These are

- ◆ thinking about what you learned (reflection)
- ◆ identifying where you should use this new learning in your teaching/assessment/ internal verification activities and what changes you need to make
- ◆ implementing all the changes you had identified

However, it should be highlighted that a few centres were using documentation that encouraged staff to reflect on the learning from their CPD and one centre held update sessions where assessors discussed learning that overlapped between subjects (eg a change in regulations that affected three units taught by different assessors). This is good practice and something all centres should consider incorporating into the agenda of regular team meetings.

There is such a direct link between regularly completing CPD, particularly updating subject-specific knowledge, valid assessment decisions and a verification outcome of high confidence. Centres need to recognise this.

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 reviews but in some instances these reviews did not evidence all the elements of the criterion on the first submission of evidence. Reviews must cover all five elements — environments; equipment; reference, learning and assessment materials — and centres are reminded to make sure they submit evidence for each element. Often some of the reports were missing or the reviews had not taken place in the current year. Another recurring issue in this criterion was that checklists of environment and equipment reviews were not in English. Evidence has to be in English, or a transcript provided, if it is to be considered.

As part of their evidence, centres should be showing that they had reviewed the learning materials. Two key items in the review of learning materials are the PowerPoint materials and the Student Learning Guides. Although there was some evidence that PowerPoint materials were updated, there was virtually no evidence the Student Learning Guides were reviewed to identify sections where updated information needs to be given to candidates. Every time before delivering each unit, these two items, together with the formative and summative assessments should be reviewed and updated 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. Currently, some centres are producing checklists and actions required but then there was contradictory evidence in criteria 4.2, 4.3 and 4.6 that changes were not made and out-of-date legislation or taxation rates continued to be used. It is important that following the identification of changes needed there are plans put in place to make the changes.

Evidence of the reviews submitted for external verification should also include evidence that identified actions are completed. Financial Services is always going to require updates for every unit every year and this is something qualification verifiers look to see evidence of happening.

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

There was better evidence this year that many centres were now reviewing the candidates' personal development plans, though the level of review in centres continues to be variable. There was still no evidence that the development needs identified are communicated to other teachers and/or assessors that should be aware of them. For example, candidates were often identified by financial services specialists as having development needs in business writing skills but there was no evidence given that there was any involvement of the communication skills teachers to give more development support. This teaching team communication may be happening, but as was often seen across all the criteria, centres are not 'selling what they do' in their evidence. This is something to be aware of when submitting evidence for virtual or remote verification. The qualification verifier has to make their decisions based on what is submitted so centres should make sure they give details of all they do when managing resources, supporting candidates and completing internal verification and assessment activities.

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.

All centres ensured candidates had scheduled one-to-one contact with their assessor at least once a semester, however in several instances these sessions still tended to be focused on being a traditional tutorial with the candidate answering questions set by the assessor. Whilst this is useful in measuring candidate progress, this kind of activity can be completed in class and the assessor's one-to-one time with the candidate should concentrate on a two-way discussion around reviewing progress — what is going well and what less well and agreeing how the candidate might address the problem areas — rather than being an extension to a class summative assessment activity.

It is recommended that centre staff discuss how they can make better use of their scheduled contact with their candidates to cover assessment planning and to review how prepared the candidate is for assessment rather than using it as a further teaching session.

It still remains the case that some evidence for this criterion is not presented in English. Whilst it is recognised that support to candidates, particularly ad hoc support given via WeChat, will not be in English, if screenshots of conversations are being presented as evidence during external verification translations have to be provided.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

This criterion was reviewed both during the generic and unit verification activities.

During the generic criteria review, a few centres did not upload valid and/or sufficient evidence as they either used material from previous years or they only submitted evidence for Stage 1 of the internal verification process. Centres need to submit evidence of all three stages of internal verification and, wherever possible, this should be from activities in the current academic year. Given the timing of the generic verification activities, Semester 1 subjects should give the evidence required, bearing in mind that evidence of internal verification Stage 2 and 3 can be from one outcome in a unit and does not need to be the whole unit if this is not available.

It is good to report that there had been an improvement in the standard of unit internal verification and standardisation activities this year. There was also evidence of a far greater level of ongoing dialogue between the assessor and internal verifier throughout the year. This was perhaps aided by greater use of online/virtual conversations which were easier to arrange than face-to-face meetings were in the past. In many centres, the standard of completion of documentation was much higher than in the past.

However, there are still centres where a minimalist tick-box approach continues to be used during standardisation and internal verification. They are not giving a clear enough picture to others during external verification as a result. These centres are also losing the opportunity to have records 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.

It is extremely unlikely that over an appropriate sample of assessments an internal verifier will have no issues or will agree with every assessment decision for every question across all the assessments in the sample. However, in some centres reports claim this is the case over a large sample of assessments. When a report 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 that an assessor needs to reflect again on their assessment decision with the internal verifier should not be seen as a criticism of the assessor. It highlights that there can be more than one view on whether the standards required have been met by the candidate and that further dialogue between the two individuals may be required. The assessor may indeed have made the correct decision, but it is only by discussing and documenting these more difficult assessment decisions that standardisation can be achieved, not only this year but in future years.

There was also an issue in a few centres where a discussion between the assessor and internal verifier resulted in a change in the assessment decisions — there was no evidence that the remaining assessments not in the internal verification sample were reviewed to check if they too required adjustments. If the internal verifier does not confirm that reviews have taken place they are either advantaging or disadvantaging the candidates in the internal verification sample over other candidates in the year.

Where good practice was seen, it was in centres where differences of views were documented together with details of joint discussions between the assessor and internal verifier showing the questions where some reflection was needed on the decisions reached. These records also form very useful standardisation records for subsequent years' assessment decisions. They can also inform teaching practice in the coming years.

Likewise, there should also be clear recording of any interpretation of decisions on whether a candidate be allowed to 're-do' or whether they have to start a new re-assessment. Some centres complete this very well whereas in other centres it is hard to see any justification for the decisions made (whether they were the correct decisions or not).

In some centres there remains an issue with the consistency of internal verification activities and documentation within the centre. In these centres, some internal verifiers were conducting excellent activities with appropriate documentation and yet others in the same centre in the same verification group were using generic reports with identical content across several units or in one case in different centres they worked in. Standardisation of approaches across a centre, taking best practice from those units where the verification reports highlight good practice and applying it in all units, should be explored.

There continues to be issues with the subject knowledge of internal verifiers (discussed in criterion 2.1) meaning that they are unable to identify either out-of-date assessment instruments or errors in assessment decisions. This was evident in the units Personal and Business Lending (H2FH 35) and Financial Services Graded Unit 2 (JO1V 35) this year. The internal verifier has to ensure they know as much about the subject they are verifying as the assessor so they can effectively support the assessor in their teaching and assessment activities.

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

This criterion was reviewed during the unit verification activities.

All centres had used the correct assessment methods and where they had made adaptations to the assessment conditions they were appropriate and in line with SQA published guidance to allow assessments to be completed remotely.

All the assessment instruments selected by the centres were either the SQA CASPs or centre devised instruments that had been prior verified previously. Certificates of prior verification were seen in every case. All the centres had also taken appropriate steps to source re-assessment instruments in a timely manner. It was good to see that several centres started the process of writing their new assessments at the start of the semester, thereby allowing sufficient time for the instruments to be prior verified.

Almost all centres use the SQA CASP for the first assessment and centre devised instruments for re-assessment. As they have done this over a number of years, there is a risk that assessment questions are becoming predictable as one year's candidates will know people who studied the unit previously. This problem can be solved if centres vary the pattern of assessment use by selecting a centre devised assessment for the first assessment and then the CASP for re-assessment in the next academic year and then use the CASP for the first assessment the following year.

There continues to be the problem highlighted previously that some centres had not taken appropriate steps to check that all the content of the assessment instrument (both questions and solutions) was up to date reflecting current products, services, legislation and taxation. This is an instance of inadequate CPD leading to difficulties in maintaining SQA's required standards. For the coming year, as an example, changes will be needed in the solutions to HP17 47 Personal Financial Awareness as there are updates amongst other things to ISA limits, contactless card limits and the range of non-cash payment mechanisms available that need to be incorporated in the assessment solution.

It was good to see that centres were using the correct techniques to judge the extent to which a candidate could undertake remediation activities when initial assessment evidence did not meet the required standards. Decisions between selection of re-do or re-assessment were based on professional judgement. As noted in 4.2 above, there remains a need for better documentation of the justification for these decisions in the records of assessment and internal verification activities.

It was noted when reviewing centres' policies during generic verification that some internal verification policies still included reference to mathematical formulas being applied to make the remediation decisions and it is recommended that centres review their policies to make sure these references are removed.

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 where centre policies and examples of their application were seen. During the unit assessment, no evidence of undetected plagiarism or collusion was identified.

There continued to be no issues with the security of assessment instruments, which is as it should be.

Good practice was seen in one centre which had prepared a very detailed handout giving guidance to candidates completing research projects on what would or would not be considered plagiarism. They had worded one scenario two ways, one example being acceptable and the other worded such that it would be considered plagiarism. This use of alternative examples was very helpful to the candidates as they developed their report writing skills based on materials researched on the internet.

Some centres are now using software such as Turnitin to help them identify plagiarism particularly in the graded unit projects. However, most software users are not giving any information about how they interpret the outputs, they simply staple the outputs to the projects. In the samples seen, there were instances where there should have been further discussion as to whether the level of overlap to existing internet material was acceptable or not. In these instances, the overlap was acceptable — they were quoting extracts from legislation — however in the absence of any comment by the assessor it was not clear whether the high level of overlap had been noticed or not. It is really good that the centres have invested in the software, but it is recommended that they show how they interpret the results rather than just stapling the outputs to the assessment.

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 no evidence of inconsistency in assessment decisions in centres.

There continues to be problems for some assessors 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 and making irrelevant theoretical comments where 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. The case study has been written so there is enough information for candidates to identify if changes in a ratio is a problem or not. Candidates should be using this information to develop their responses to questions.

Where the assessment asks candidates to identify 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 that can be asked, and not questions 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 do they have is irrelevant; what is needed is a question about what might happen if they lost that one customer.

For the second year, there was also a problem in a few centres regarding the validity of the assessment decisions in Financial Services Graded Unit 2 (JO1V 35). The root cause of the issue was the assessors' lack of understanding of the subjects being researched by the candidates. As a result, the assessors were not able to accurately judge the authenticity or value of the primary research or the feasibility/accuracy of the conclusions and recommendations. To help make valid assessment decisions about these projects, the assessor should undertake some personal research on the project topic (which they should include in their CPD records) if they have not recently updated their own knowledge of the subject being researched.

Although all assessments seen were accompanied by completed checklists very few assessors are giving candidates feedback on their assessment other than comments on the candidates' English. Whilst it is valid that these comments are made, there should also be comment on the subject content of the assessment. Very little, if any, feedback is given to candidates whose assessments meet the minimum evidence requirements. Even if an assessment is satisfactory, there will always be areas that the candidate can improve on and they should be given that development feedback to help them in their future studies.

In some centres where the candidates submit their evidence electronically, good use continues to be made of the comments function with assessors typing their feedback on the candidate script. Internal verifiers were also annotating comments by this method. This is a very good technique and is something that all centres are encouraged to consider implementing. As almost all assessments are now open book, candidate assessment

responses will be completed electronically so assessment feedback should be easy to add in electronically.

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.

All centres presented evidence of the dissemination of feedback to staff. However, it remains the case that the extent to which the feedback is used to inform assessment practice is very variable. There is still only limited evidence that shows these reports have been used to inform future assessment practice. When a centre has an action plan there is evidence of the completion of the plans, but very few centres discuss the recommendations in their reports to consider whether they should be implemented or reflect on the good practice identified to consider how to extend those practices further.

Good practice continues to be seen in a few centres that reviewed all their SQA reports at a minuted team meeting at the start of the semester. The minutes of these meetings included plans to implement changes with people named as being responsible for ensuring these changes are completed. It is recommended that all centres develop action plans to implement changes and include examples of the application of these changes in their future external verification submissions.

A few centres adopted the good practice highlighted in previous years from centres in Scotland where a separate meeting is also held to review this qualification verification summary report and decide how to include any of the recommendations they do not already follow in their action plans for the year. Likewise, these centres consider whether they can implement any good practice highlighted in the report.

It is hoped that all centres will make full use of this report to inform their resource planning, student support, assessment and internal verification activities.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2020–21:

- ◆ Very regular meetings being held to keep staff updated with the amended SQA arrangements for assessment and adaptations during 2020–21
- ◆ Sharing learning and reflecting as a team on what has been learned during individual CPD activities
- ◆ Very regular online meetings between the assessor and internal verifiers with clear documentation of decisions made
- ◆ Detailed guidance given to candidates with examples of what would be considered plagiarism in project-based assessments
- ◆ Very specific guidance with examples being given to candidates to help them avoid plagiarism in Research Skills and Financial Services Graded Unit 2 units
- ◆ The use of online comments functions by assessors and internal verifiers when reviewing electronically submitted assessments
- ◆ Reflection on the areas for development highlighted in the previous year's QSVR during the pre-delivery internal verification meeting and implementing changes in the centre as a result

Specific areas for development

The following areas for development were reported during session 2020–21:

- ◆ Develop checklists to ensure all documents are uploaded for the external verification of the generic criteria and that all documents are in English or, if they are not, that translations are provided
- ◆ Subject-specific CPD has to be completed by everyone involved in teaching, assessing and internally verifying a unit, with their learning applied in the updating of learning and assessment materials
- ◆ Ensure there is evidence that any candidate development needs identified have been shared with those who are best placed to provide additional support
- ◆ Ensure the scheduled contact between candidates and assessors concentrates on assessment planning and is not another teaching activity
- ◆ Ensure that records of internal verification are comprehensive and that there is consistency of internal verification activities and completion of documentation across all units within the centre
- ◆ Ensure when assessment decisions require to be adjusted, this adjustment applies to all candidates and not just those in the internal verification sample
- ◆ Ensure the rationale for every decision regarding redo/re-assessment based on professional judgement is documented and that there are no references to mathematical formulas to make decisions in the centre's policies
- ◆ Vary the rotation of the use of CASP and centre devised assessments for first assessment and re-assessment
- ◆ If using anti plagiarism software, demonstrate how the results from the software were reviewed

- ◆ If assessing graded unit projects, assessors should complete some CPD on the topic being researched if they have not recently updated their knowledge on the subject of the project
- ◆ Give feedback to all candidates, remembering even candidates who have presented satisfactory evidence will benefit from development feedback
- ◆ Follow up on the feedback from qualification verifiers by developing plans to implement agreed changes and sharing evidence of the application of these changes in next year's external verification evidence
- ◆ Make use of the guidance in this report!