SQA Advanced Qualifications and Graded Unit (International)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2021

Business Management

Verification group number: 254

Introduction

The following units were selected for verification:

- HP71 47 Managing People and Organisations SCQF level 7
- HP0Y 47 International Business Environment: Geographical Influences SCQF level 7
- HP7C 47 Business: Graded Unit 1 SCQF level 7
- HP7D 48 Business: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8
- H3P5 35 Global Trade and Business: Graded Unit 2 SCQF level 8

The following SQA awards were selected for verification:

- GM52 48 AD Business with Accounting
- GM57 48 AD Global Trade and Business
- GE81 16 HND Business with Information Technology
- GM53 48 AD Business with Human Resource Management
- GM51 48 AD Business

SQA applies different models of qualification verification depending on the geographical location of centres and whether the verification has been conducted through visiting, remotely or virtually. In China, where there are a number of long-established centres with large numbers of candidates, SQA focuses on awards and units within selected awards rather than verifying units across different awards. Qualification verification criteria are divided into those that can be classed as generic and those directly relating to qualifications, with the generic criteria being verified once for a whole award. The qualification criteria are verified separately for units selected for verification within the selected awards. In other parts of the world where centres are more dispersed and candidate numbers are smaller, SQA will select units and verify those units across different awards.

Because of these differences, and because the majority of the verification activity was undertaken within Chinese centres in 2020–21, the QVSR is structured with comments relating to the verification of Chinese centres and separate comments relating to the verification of three centres based in Myanmar.

Until 2020 there has been a mix of visiting and remote verification events. Remote qualification verification involves centres providing evidence in electronic format set against specific verification criteria, whilst for a verification event involving a visit by a qualification verifier an expanded set of verification criteria are applied. The pandemic has caused considerable disruption to travel as well as impacting directly on centres, and as a consequence the format of qualification verification activity over the academic session 2020–21 had to be adapted. Visiting qualification verification was simply not practical and, to ensure that external quality assurance requirements were maintained, SQA introduced virtual verification to supplement remote events. Virtual events can involve more than one qualification verifier and have a primary verifier, who co-ordinates contacts with the centre and chairs an online feedback event that can include feedback for a number of units from different verification groups.

A further change was the continued international rollout of SQA Advanced Qualifications awards which have now almost completely replaced HNC and HND awards in international markets. The qualifications covered in this report are almost entirely Advanced Qualifications

and Advanced Units. By the time of the next QVSR, HN awards will have been entirely replaced by SQA Advanced Qualifications.

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.

In the Chinese centres the staff are well qualified in terms of academic qualifications, and many have gained a lot of experience in delivering and assessing SQA qualifications over many years. Centres provided CVs and CPD records showing that staff had both undergraduate and relevant postgraduate qualifications. Some staff had formal teaching and internal verification qualifications but, in the main, training has come through attending CPD events either run by SQA or within the centres themselves. Some staff are research active and have published academic papers, and a number of staff hold 'good teaching awards' that were awarded by their centre.

Centres continue to commit resources to training staff and ensuring that they are familiar with their roles and responsibilities, and internal training has continued despite the difficulties that centres have faced globally over the period covered by this report. As in past reports, there was evidence of staff applying advice and guidance disseminated from SQA sponsored events. This was particularly evident in taking forward lessons learned from the previous academic session and making improvements to delivery and assessment in line with the SQA 'Circle of Success' model that was promoted at the 2019 Beijing Professional Development Conference (PDC). This is important, and SQA relies on staff passing good practice to others who were not able to attend training events, and implementing that good practice.

In the three Myanmar centres selected for verification, staff had relevant qualifications and attended some internal events. The centres did not initially submit evidence of the assessor and internal verifier qualifications and training, and following the qualification verification events each centre was asked to submit relevant evidence relating to the staff involved in the SQA awards. The lack of evidence submitted indicated that centres had a limited understanding of the requirements and criteria involved in qualification verification.

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

The Chinese centres provided 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. Evidence provided included checklists, policy documents, minutes of meetings, resource lists, assessment and teaching plans and a range of other evidence showing that the centres review their teaching environment and resources on an ongoing basis.

The internal verification process covers the checking of assessments and learning materials, and centres consistently demonstrated that they consider the resources required and that changes are made as necessary. Minutes of meetings indicated that staff regularly review learning resources and update teaching and assessment plans. Most centres for units in this verification group (254) used the SQA-produced China Assessment Support Pack (CASP), but many centres have also devised or obtained alternative assessments for re-assessment,

and these had been submitted to SQA for prior verification. Centres also submitted resource checklists including information on library services, 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.

The Chinese centres evidenced criterion 3.2 in a range of ways. Evidence included individual learning plans, progress reviews, support services, personal development plans, reflective accounts, personal SWOT analyses, induction plans, study skills support and a broad range of other mechanisms used to help ensure candidates are informed and supported.

Candidates were provided with handbooks and took part in a range of induction events. 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. Each centre operates their own system to ensure that appropriate pastoral care and support is provided often involving dedicated student advisors/mentors. These systems were outlined in policy documents and records of meetings with candidates, including individual tutorial records and personal development plans that showed that candidate support mechanisms are in place and being implemented. Centres also provided details of timetabled guidance slots and individual tutorial times, with examples of completed records and communications including those through WeChat. Centres provide access to specialist support services as required.

This can be a difficult criterion for centres to evidence and centres have invested in appropriate processes to help support their candidates.

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

The Chinese centres provided evidence that included individual learning plans, timetables, individual tutorial plans, candidate handbooks, office hours; staff contact details, candidate feedback, and other records and communications.

Criterion 3.3 is directly linked with criterion 3.2 and centres have invested in ensuring that candidates are matched against the requirements of their award, and that appropriate support mechanisms are in place. Timetables showed that centres have regular weekly contact for the delivery of different units. Candidate support is ongoing and centres provided examples of feedback given to candidates for guidance and much of the feedback was detailed and very useful. Individual tutorial records showed details of discussions between staff and candidates and indicated an ongoing effort to provide support and help. Contact between candidates and assessors was generally very good across the centres verified and the availability of help and support is a critical factor in helping to improve a candidate's chances of success.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

Between generic and qualification verification events all of the Chinese centres provided an IV policy and completed IV records. Many also provided a range of further documents such as minutes of staff meetings, assessment instruments, unit specifications, sampling policies, assessor reports, handbooks, classroom observation records and marking schemes.

There was generally an excellent use of the internal verification process. Records commonly contained a lot of detail with regard to discussions and decisions made. The records were often supplemented with records of standardisation discussions being contained within minutes and assessment summary reports. The records showed that standardisation was taking place and that the internal quality assurance process is firmly embedded at centres.

Many centres now regularly complete an 'Assessor Feedback Summary'. These records provide an evaluative narrative feedback on the delivery and assessment of an individual unit, in the same manner as an annual course report. These were generally examples of good practice and strengthened the taking forward and implementation of 'lessons learned' in line with the SQA model of the 'Circle of Success'. The incorporation of reviews into the academic cycle and preparatory stages of the next time delivery of courses is very important, and was a central theme at the Professional Development Conference held in Beijing in August 2019.

At the Myanmar centres that were verified, further work needs to be undertaken to develop a greater understanding of the internal quality assurance process and to ensure that it is properly implemented. Two of the three centres were given an action for criterion 4.2 and the third centre had a recommendation. Providing completed records and the centre policies proved challenging, and records that were subsequently submitted tended to be of a checklist nature rather than containing content recording discussions about assessment standards and the decisions being made. It is vital that centres understand that internal quality assurance processes must not only be in place but must be used effectively to provide a check and balance, and to ensure that assessment standards are correctly identified and that assessment decisions are justifiable and consistently applied.

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

As in past years the Chinese centres used in the majority of cases the SQA-devised assessments with most also having a locally-devised prior-verified set of assessments. Many of the prior-verified assessments followed a similar format to the SQA ones, but often incorporated case study material with a Chinese context, which is good practice. Centres using their own assessments had passed them through the prior verification process, with some being used for first assessment and other centres using them for re-assessment purposes.

Assessment instruments were passed through a pre-delivery check, which was recorded in an IV record. This is essential as it provides the opportunity for staff to check they are using the correct up-to-date assessment, and also allows staff time to refresh their ideas about standards and issues involved in assessing each unit. All centres had the up-to-date unit

specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions can be appropriately adapted to meet those specific needs.

Two of the three Myanmar centres were weak in providing internal verification records, both at the pre-delivery and sampling stages. Internal quality assurance is an essential component that centres must demonstrate is not only in place, but also implemented effectively. Centres must provide evidence that the assessments have been checked, that standards have been identified, that assessment conditions are correctly understood, and that there is a consensus between different assessors and the internal verifier regarding these matters. In the sampling stage, the internal quality checks should relate to the correct identification and consistent application of standards when assessors have made assessment judgements. Two of the centres struggled to provide the evidence required, while the third centre was more advanced regarding quality assurance checks.

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

The centres in China used a variety of means to determine the authenticity of the candidate evidence. The universal approach was for the candidates to sign an honesty/authenticity declaration that is submitted along with their work. In addition, each centre provided 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. Policies, roles and responsibilities were made available in the candidate and staff handbooks and were often highlighted during candidate induction. There were a modest number of instances where copying or poor referencing had been identified and appropriate action was taken in line with centre policy.

Electronic checkers were used, though by a small number of centres, 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.

All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA for these particular units.

The candidate evidence at the Myanmar centres was accompanied by signed honesty/ authenticity declarations that candidates submitted along with their work. The candidate evidence and assessment checklists indicated that the centres had applied the required assessment conditions. The centres were advised to use the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit to strengthen their overall approach to internal quality assurance.

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

Centres in China are familiar with the units and the assessments for the units within VG 254. Candidate work was accompanied by authenticity statements and assessors used assessment checklists to record assessment decisions. Assessors usually provided feedback on the scripts and the assessment checklists, but as in past years the amount and nature of the feedback varied. Sometimes it was very detailed and was aimed at helping candidates improve their responses in future, whilst on other occasions feedback was more focused on what candidates must do with regard to remediation or re-assessment.

The evidence from verification records and minutes of meetings indicate that there is an understanding of the important role of discussion in attaining standardisation. The use of professional judgement and a thorough use of the internal verification system as a mechanism for making sound assessment decisions are very positive indicators that the centres and staff have taken past lessons forward and are making accurate and consistent assessment decisions.

All three centres in Myanmar selected for verification had either actions or recommendations set against criterion 4.6. This was in line with the generally weak application of the internal quality assurance processes, the result of which was a vague understanding of the standards, a lack of knowledge of the requirements for a remote qualification verification event and a degree of inconsistency in some assessment judgements. Understanding and successfully implementing the internal quality assurance process is crucial in improving success at external verification events, but centres must also understand the criteria that are required to be evidenced at external events.

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

The Chinese centres all provided a retention/data processing policy and provided the evidence and records required by SQA. It is standard practice in China that 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. There were clear processes in place regarding the storage and security of the evidence and records being retained.

Two of the three Myanmar centres failed to provide details of their policy regarding the retention of candidate evidence. Whilst some records and candidate evidence were provided indicating that some work was retained, there was no detail on the centre policy and processes for securely storing candidate evidence and records. Again, this indicated a lack of understanding of the external qualification verification criteria and their requirements.

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

The Chinese centres provided procedural documents, minutes of meetings, management manuals, and a range of other documents to show that feedback from external qualification verification events was being disseminated. Qualification verification reports were made available as required, and areas of good practice and recommendations were distributed. In some instances records showed that staff signed for copies, and the feedback was an agenda item in the minutes of some meetings and was also listed in some of the pre-delivery IV checklists. Having a link in the internal verification and standardisation process to external verification outcomes is a very positive step in taking forward lessons learned and making improvements wherever possible. The best examples showed actions being set to help improve delivery and assessment in the next academic session and this fits well with the 'Circle of Success' model promoted at the 2019 SQA Professional Development Conference in Beijing.

Areas of good practice reported by qualification verifiers

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

♦ Excellent records of evaluative reflection and reviews after assessment that are then fed into the internal quality assurance process to enable improvements where possible.
♦ Good advice and feedback from internal verifiers fostering a supportive working relationship with assessors.
♦ Dissemination of messages from SQA-sponsored events to staff who could not attend events.
♦ Centres citing examples of good practice that were implemented each academic year, demonstrating continuous improvement.
♦ Formal course meetings where candidates were asked for their feedback and views.
♦ The quality and detail of feedback provided by some centres to candidates 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.
♦ A thorough 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.
♦ The use of electronic checkers to check originality of candidate evidence.
♦ Using external qualification verification feedback to improve delivery and assessment in future academic sessions.

Specific areas for development

The following area for development was reported during session 2020–21:

♦ An ongoing effort is required to encourage the use of a formal recognised referencing system combined with guidance on how this is done.
♦ Some centres require a greater understanding of what criteria must be evidenced at the differing types of external qualification verification events, and the evidence that should be provided.
♦ Some centres are advised to use the SQA Internal Verification Toolkit to help develop the implementation of their internal quality assurance process.
♦ A better recording of discussions regarding assessments, assessment conditions, assessment standards and assessment judgements rather than simple yes/no type recording.
♦ When centres submit evidence for remote/virtual generic verification there should 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 each 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 work with care to ensure that the grades are genuinely justified.
♦ Ensuring that when a sample of candidate evidence is submitted for remote verification, 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 they should be amended.

♦ Some project titles were again very general, with examples including 'The marketing strategy of XXXXX'. 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.