

SQA Advanced Unit Specification

General information for centres

Unit title: Business Awareness and Continuing Professional Development

Unit code: HP3H 48

Unit purpose: This Unit is designed to enable candidates to recognise and evaluate the external factors affecting the performance of companies in the modern business environment. It also provides candidates with the opportunity to identify and assess the internal measures companies are taking in order to respond to external business pressures. The Unit also allows candidates to recognise the importance that continued learning and Continuing Professional Development will play in the development of their careers in a rapidly changing business environment. This recognition is reinforced in that candidates are provided with the opportunity to develop a Continuing Professional Development Action Plan

The Unit has been expressed in generic terms and is thus appropriate for a wide range of candidates pursuing different vocational/professional careers.

On completion of the Unit candidates should be able to:

1. Evaluate the key external factors affecting either positively or negatively the sustainability and profitability of companies operating in the modern business environment.
2. Evaluate internal measures companies have taken in response to external pressures for change.
3. Develop a Personal Continuing Professional Development Action Plan.

Credit value: 1 SQA Credit at SCQF level 8: (8 SCQF credit points at SCQF level 8*)

**SCQF credit points are used to allocate credit to qualifications in the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). Each qualification in the Framework is allocated a number of SCQF credit points at an SCQF level. There are 12 SCQF levels, ranging from National 1 to Doctorates.*

Recommended prior knowledge and skills: Candidates should have good communication skills. These may be demonstrated by achievement of core skill Communication at Higher level or by possession of Higher English and Communication or a suitable SQA Advanced Communication Unit (SCQF level 7) such as Communication: Practical Skills. It would be beneficial if candidates have some work experience but this is not essential.

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Core skills: There may be opportunities to gather evidence towards Core Skills in this Unit, although there is no automatic certification of Core Skills or Core Skills components.

Context for delivery: This Unit was originally designed to be included in the SQA Advanced Engineering Framework of awards but has been written in generic terms so that it may be included in a number of SQA Advanced Certificate and SQA Advanced Diploma group awards. It is recommended that it should be taught and assessed within the context of the particular group award to which it contributes.

Assessment: With regard to Outcomes 1 and 2 a Case Study should be used to assess both outcomes. Candidates should write a report based on questions developed around the Case Study. The report should be 1200 -1500 words in length. Candidates should be allowed 14-days to complete the report from the date the Case Study is issued to them by their lecturer.

The assessment for Outcome 3 should involve candidates in developing their own Continuing Professional Development Action Plan. Centres may choose to develop a pro forma for the Action Plan which all candidates use or allow candidates to present the Action Plan in their own format. Candidates should be allowed 14-days to complete the Action Plan from the date it is issued to them by their lecturer.

In the case of both the Action Plan and Case Study centres should make every reasonable effort to ensure that candidates submit their own work. Where copying or plagiarism is suspected centres may wish to interview a candidate(s) to check her/his knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. A checklist should be used to record oral evidence of the candidate's knowledge and understanding.

Unit specification: statement of standards

Unit title: Business Awareness and Continuing Professional Development

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The sections of the Unit stating the Outcomes, knowledge and/or skills, and evidence requirements are mandatory.

Where evidence for Outcomes is assessed on a sample basis, the whole of the content listed in the knowledge and/or skills section must be taught and available for assessment. Candidates should not know in advance the items on which they will be assessed and different items should be sampled on each assessment occasion.

Outcome 1

Evaluate the key external factors affecting either positively or negatively the sustainability and profitability of companies operating in the modern business environment

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Position in the supply chain
- ◆ Scope for product/service innovation and development
- ◆ Market sector company is operating in (e.g. national and international competition)
- ◆ Globalisation of the market place
- ◆ Impact of Internet and e-commerce
- ◆ Economic factors (e.g. Interest Rates, Sterling Exchange Rate in relation to exporting)
- ◆ Technological changes
- ◆ Labour market skills shortages
- ◆ Environmental factors

Outcome 2

Evaluate internal measures companies have taken in response to external pressures for change.

Knowledge and/or skills

- ◆ Long term strategic and operational planning (eg plans to diversify product/service range to meet changing market conditions, better links between strategic and human resource planning to, for example, better judge future skills needs etc.)
- ◆ New product and/or service developments (eg enhancing specification of existing products/services (higher added value), greater specialisation into niche markets etc.)
- ◆ Changes to organisational structures
- ◆ New working practices
- ◆ Efficiency measures (including outsourcing where this has occurred)
- ◆ Improved customer focus (eg better after sales service, working more closely with customers during the design and development phase etc)

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- ◆ Application of Information and Communications Technology (better internal and external communication, improved Management Information Systems etc)
- ◆ Increase use of technology (eg automation, lean production etc)
- ◆ Internal and external training to meet changing skills demands

Evidence requirements for Outcomes 1 and 2

Each candidate will need to provide evidence that she/he can, with reference to a particular company, evaluate both the positive and negative impact of external factors affecting the profitability and sustainability of the company. In addition, each candidate will also have to make an accurate and clear evaluation of the internal measures the company has taken to maintain profitability and sustainability in the face of external drivers for change. A Case Study should be used for assessment purposes

Evidence for the knowledge and/or skills items in both Outcomes 1 and 2 will be provided on a sample basis. The number of items to be sampled in both Outcomes 1 and 2 is **five out of nine**. The evidence should be presented in response to a specific questions based on the Case Study. In order to ensure that candidates will not be able to foresee what items they will be questioned on, a different sample of five out the nine knowledge and/or skills items in both Outcomes 1 and 2 is required each time the Outcome is assessed. Candidates must provide a satisfactory response to the five items sampled from Outcome 1 and the five items sampled from Outcome 2.

Where sampling takes place, a candidate's response can be judged to be satisfactory where the evidence provided is sufficient to meet the requirements by showing that the candidate is able to:

Outcome 1

- ◆ Identify the position of the company in any supply chain(s) and assess any changes the company has had to make to meet the demands of companies both higher up and lower down in the supply chain(s)
- ◆ Assess the company's scope for product/service innovation and development especially where the company may be part of a bigger company (e.g. a site in an international company)
- ◆ Assess the level of competition that is active in the market place(s) the company is operating in (eg is it a specialist or a mass product/service market place, how strong is the national and/or international competition, how short are the product/service life cycles)
- ◆ Identify the impact on the company of increasing globalisation of the market place
- ◆ Assess the impact that the Internet and e-commerce is currently having on the business
- ◆ Assess the impact economic factors may be having on the business
- ◆ Identify the impact that technological change is having on the business
- ◆ Assess the difficulties the company may be having in recruiting skilled labour especially in skills shortage areas
- ◆ Assess the impact that any environmental factors are having on the business.

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Outcome 2

- ◆ Identify any evidence of long term strategic and/or operational planning.
- ◆ Identify any evidence of changes to product/service range to meet changing market conditions
- ◆ Explain any changes to internal organisational structures and assess the impact of these in terms of improvements in the quality of products and/or services and the performance of the company generally
- ◆ Identify and assess the impact of any new working practices the company has introduced in order to ensure sustainability and/or enhance its profitability
- ◆ Explain any efficiency measures the company has taken to improve profitability and sustainability
- ◆ Explain any steps the company may have taken to improve the services it provides to its customers
- ◆ Assess the impact that Information and Communications Technology is having on the company's services and general performance
- ◆ Explain the benefits to the company of the introduction of any new technologies
- ◆ Explain the significance of any internal and external training (and re-training) that is taking place especially in relation to bridging any skills gaps.

Assessment guidelines for Outcomes 1 and 2

The assessment for Outcomes 1 and 2 should take the form of a Case Study covering the knowledge and/or Skills items in both outcomes. Candidates should write a report based on questions developed around the Case Study. The report should be 1200 -1500 words in length. Candidates should be allowed 14-days to complete the report from the date the Case Study is issued to them by their lecturer.

Centres should make every reasonable effort to ensure that candidates submit their own work. Where copying or plagiarism is suspected centres may wish to interview a candidate(s) to check her/his knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. A checklist should be used to record oral evidence of the candidate's knowledge and understanding.

Outcome 3

Develop a Personal Continuing Professional Development Action Plan

Knowledge and/or Skills Items

- ◆ Learning theories
- ◆ Learning styles
- ◆ Formal and informal learning
- ◆ Systems for accrediting CPD
- ◆ Qualifications frameworks/range of qualifications available in vocational/professional area
- ◆ Advantages and disadvantages of different sources of learning (eg traditional class based, work-based learning, distance learning, on-line learning etc)

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Evidence requirements

Candidates will be required to provide evidence for **all** the knowledge and/or skills items in this Outcome.

Assessment guidelines

The assessment of this Outcome involves candidates developing their own Continuing Professional Development Action Plan covering the next 3 to 5 years of their careers. Centres may choose to develop a pro forma for the Action Plan which all candidates use or allow candidates to present the Action Plan in their own format. Candidates should be allowed 14-days to complete the Action Plan from the date it is issued to them by their lecturer.

Centres should make every reasonable effort to ensure that candidates submit their own work. Where copying or plagiarism is suspected centres may wish to interview a candidate(s) to check her/his knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. A checklist should be used to record oral evidence of the candidate's knowledge and understanding.

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Administrative information

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SQA acknowledges the valuable contribution that Scotland's colleges have made to the development of SQA Advanced Qualifications.

FURTHER INFORMATION: Call SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 44 (0) 141 500 5030 or 0345 279 1000. Alternatively, complete our [Centre Feedback Form](#).

Unit specification: support notes

Unit title: Business Awareness and Continuing Professional Development

This part of the Unit specification is offered as guidance. The support notes are not mandatory.

While the exact time allocated to this Unit is at the discretion of the centre, the notional design length is 40 hours.

Guidance on the content and context for this Unit

This Unit has been written in order to allow candidates to examine the following: -

- (1) the various external factors that are currently impacting either positively or negatively on the sustainability and profitability of companies.
- (2) the ways in which companies are responding internally to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing business environment.
- (3) the best way for individuals to plan their future learning and development in order to develop the necessary knowledge and skills to work in the modern business environment.

It is acknowledged that the Unit content is potentially broad and it is important that candidates are provided with appropriate guidance as to which aspects of external and internal factors affecting companies and learning they should primarily focus on. Nevertheless, candidates should not be unnecessarily inhibited from investigating areas of interest to them that are not contained within the formal learning and teaching process.

Outcomes 1 and 2 have been written primarily with private sector business organisations in mind but a number of the knowledge and/or skills items, particularly in Outcome 2, can equally be applied to public sector and voluntary organisations. Lecturers may find it beneficial during the delivery of the Unit to illustrate how some of these items apply to public sector and voluntary organisations (e.g. with reference to public sector organisations adopting practices from the private sector).

One of the main purposes of this Unit is to encourage candidates to think carefully about the future learning and qualifications they undertake with a view to planning future career options. It will be important to highlight to candidates the fact that their careers may change direction a number of times during their working life and it is thus important that they have the necessary learning and qualifications to meet these changes. Such changes may well be beyond the candidates' control, being, for example, a result of changes in the work place, so it is important that clear connections are drawn between the work in Outcomes 1 and 2 and that in Outcome 3.

Whilst the Unit has been written in generic terms, it should be set within the context which is familiar to candidates. For example, for students studying a SQA Advanced Engineering award the Unit could be related to the context in which incorporated engineers work in industry. If necessary the terminology used in the Unit can be adapted to suit the relevant work place.

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The Unit is likely to be delivered to both candidates with little or no work experience and those with significant work experience. With regard to the latter type of candidates it is important that they are provided with opportunities to reflect on their work place experience with a view to setting it in context with changes in the modern business environment. This should provide a very good platform for these candidates to enhance their own learning. In classes where both candidates with little or no work experience and those with significant work experience are present, it may be helpful to draw on the knowledge, experiences and ideas of the latter candidates to promote discussions which allow modern work place experience to be set in some kind of context.

Outcome 1 looks at the various external factors that may influence a company's competitiveness and sustainability. Such factors may include company size, position in the supply chain, opportunities for product/service innovation and development*, the market sector the company is operating in, product/service life cycles, globalisation of the market place, impact of Internet and e-commerce, economic factors, rapid technological change and environmental factors. It is not suggested that candidates should consider the financial condition of the company in any depth, as this is rightly a subject in its own right. However, some reference to the current financial position of the company in terms of its ability to sustain long-term profitability may be useful. Candidates should become familiar with the relevant terminology and should use it when describing various situations. One approach to delivering this Outcome would be to encourage candidates to consider the factors shown above as they may apply to a company in the sector area the candidate is likely to work in. One possibility would be to look at, say, a company in one of the following three categories: a small company (typically 11 to 50 employees), a medium size company (typically 51 to 250 employees) or a large company (above 250 employees). Alternatively, for those candidates currently in employment there may be value in applying the factors shown above to the company they work for.

* This may be an external factor because the level of product innovation and design in a company may be controlled by head office, which might operate, for example, in another country.

It may be helpful in delivering Outcome 1 to make use of some kind of conceptual framework tool to assist in the evaluation of a company's current strategies and competitive performance. An example of such a conceptual framework is the Puttick Grid that was developed by the Warwick Manufacturing Group for the engineering and manufacturing sectors.

In Outcome 2, candidates should examine approaches companies have taken to respond to changes in the external business environment. Such approaches could include improved long term strategic and operational planning, new product and service developments, changes to organisational structures, efficiency measures (including outsourcing parts of the business), increased customer focus, application of ICT (Information and Communications Technology), new working practices, increased use of technology (eg automation, lean production), and internal and external training.

When considering new product and/or service developments it may be helpful to include a discussion of the cost implications of introducing any new product or service. It may be useful to explain to candidates the importance of balancing these costs against, say, the failure to introduce new products or services (eg market drop-off of existing products and/or services leading to fall-off in profitability).

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In considering organisational structures there may be value in providing candidates with details of the types of structure that can exist in companies such as hierarchical versus, flat, centralised versus decentralised, divisional versus functional, product versus service, hybrid and matrix structures. It may also be helpful to highlight the increasingly important role that teams are playing in many companies operations.

It may be beneficial to look at the increasingly important role ICT is playing in many companies by looking at examples of where ICT is used to enhance performance in such areas as communications, marketing and product and stock control.

In Outcome 3 candidates should be provided with the opportunity to explore the process of learning and the different learning styles that people can adopt. It is intended that a consideration of learning and learning styles will provide the platform for developing an initial Personal Continuing Professional Development Action Plan which will require updating periodically as candidates careers progress. It is acknowledged that the subject of learning and learning styles is very large and it will be necessary to be selective in what areas are chosen. With regards to learning it may be useful to look at the ideas relating to deep and surface learning. It may also be useful to look at the work of Tony Buzan. It may also be helpful to consider potential barriers to learning.

With regard to learning styles there may be value in allowing candidates to complete a learning styles questionnaire, such as the one developed by Honey and Mumford, so they can ascertain their preferred learning style(s).

Other work that is likely to be required before candidates can develop their Continuing Professional Development Action Plan includes the following:

- (1) explanation of the differences between formal, semi-formal and informal learning
- (2) CPD schemes offered by relevant professional bodies
- (3) the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
- (4) range of qualifications options available in the vocational area(s) the candidates are likely to work
- (5) advantages and disadvantages of different sources of learning including, class based learning, work-based learning and distance and/or on-line learning opportunities

Guidance on the delivery and assessment of this Unit

This Unit is a core Unit within all SQA Advanced Diploma Engineering awards. As such the Unit should be delivered in the context of the modern business environment and the importance of learning as it applies to the engineering and manufacturing sectors in general and the area of engineering covered by the award in particular. Given the content of the Unit, particularly that relating to learning and future career planning, it is recommended that the Unit be delivered towards the end of an SQA Advanced Diploma Engineering award.

Where the Unit is incorporated into other group awards it is recommended that it be delivered in the context of the specific occupational area(s) that the award is designed to cover. As in the

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case of the SQA Advanced Diploma Engineering awards it is recommended that for the reasons already given that the Unit be delivered towards the end of the award.

This Unit has been designed to promote the development of investigative, analytical and critical thinking skills. It is important that candidates are provided with the appropriate support to develop these skills. This support may come in the form of individual or group support from the lecturer delivering the Unit, through group activities, or with reference to appropriate textbooks, reports or papers or from some other source(s) of information or knowledge. Reports, papers and other sources of information may be accessed via a number of different web sites operated by the following: Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise, United Kingdom Government, Labour Market Research Organisations, and Sector Skills Councils relating to the occupational area or Professional Bodies relating to the occupational area. It is important that the information on these web sites is checked regularly as new information on such areas as market trends, labour market and skills shortage forecasts etc. becomes available all the time.

Details on approaches to assessment are given under Evidence Requirements and Assessment guidelines under each Outcome in the SQA Advanced Unit specification: statement of standards section. It is recommended that these sections be read carefully before proceeding with assessment of candidates.

Open learning

This Unit could be delivered by distance learning, which may incorporate some degree of on-line support. However, with regard to assessment, planning would be required by the centre concerned to ensure the sufficiency and authenticity of candidate evidence.

For information on normal open learning arrangements, please refer to the SQA guide *Assessment and Quality Assurance of Open and Distance Learning* (SQA 2000).

Equality and inclusion

This unit specification has been designed to ensure that there are no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment. The individual needs of learners should be taken into account when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Further advice can be found on our website www.sqa.org.uk/assessmentarrangements.

General information for candidates

Unit title: Business Awareness and Continuing Professional Development

This Unit has been designed to allow you to identify and evaluate the importance of external factors affecting modern companies. Such factors include scope for product/service innovation and development, level of competition both nationally and internationally, impact of the Internet and e-commerce and technological changes.

This Unit will also provide you with an opportunity to examine ways that companies have responded internally to the pressures from external factors. Such internal responses may include organisational restructuring, new working practices, greater customer focus, increased use of Information and Communication Technologies and Technology generally and better internal and external training.

It will become increasingly necessary for you to develop new knowledge and skills if you are to keep in employment and develop your career when working in such a rapidly changing business environment. Thus, the Unit also allows you the opportunity to examine the best ways for you to learn new knowledge and skills and to develop an initial Continuing Professional Development Action Plan for future learning and career development beyond your SQA Advanced course.

It is likely that during the teaching of the Unit you will be provided with, or have to obtain through investigation, significant amounts of information relevant to modern business practices and learning. You will be required to analyse this information and judge its value in supporting any views you wish to put forward. Thus, another benefit of taking the Unit is that you will be encouraged to develop or enhance new skills in investigation, analysis and critical thinking.

You should not be concerned if you have little or no knowledge of how modern companies operate as you will be provided with case study materials to illustrate how they work. If you do have previous experience, or are currently in employment, your lecturer may encourage you to use this knowledge to set the information you receive during the teaching of the Unit in some kind of context. They may also ask you to share this knowledge with the rest of your class so that others can benefit from your experiences.

By the end of the Unit you will be expected to have a clearer understanding of the external factors affecting modern companies and how companies have responded internally to meet these external pressures for change. You will also be expected to have a greater appreciation of the importance of learning and Continuing Professional Development in your future career development and to have developed an initial Continuing Professional Development Action Plan.

The assessment for this Unit will involve a Case Study for Outcomes 1 and 2 and a Continuing Professional Development Action Plan for Outcome 3. With regard to the Case Study you will be required to complete a report based on questions around the Case Study. The report length should be between 1200 and 1500 words. You will be given 14-days to complete the report from the date it is issued to you by your lecturer.

The Continuing Professional Development Plan will provide you with an opportunity to plan your career over the next 3 to 5 years. The Centre where you are studying may provide you

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with a pro forma for this Action Plan or you may be allowed to complete it in your own format. You will be allowed 14-days to complete the Action Plan from the date it is issued to you by your lecturer.