Higher National Qualifications (China)

Qualification Verification Summary Report 2017
Economics

Introduction

The following units were selected for verification:

♦ F7J8 34 Economic Issues: An Introduction SCQF level 7
♦ F7J6 35 Economics 1: Micro and Macro Theory and Application SCQF level 8
♦ F86E 35 Economics 2: The World Economy SCQF level 8

All units are current and none have been revised this session. The majority of verification activity during the 2016–17 session was undertaken through visits, with a number of events being completed on a remote basis.

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.

The staff are well qualified in terms of academic qualifications and many have significant experience in delivery and assessment of SQA qualifications. Relatively few staff had formal teaching or internal verification qualifications. Continuing professional development (CPD) was good with relevant training and attendance at SQA related events. There was evidence that information from the SQA Professional Development Conference was being used and passed to other staff. This is particularly important, as only a restricted number of staff can attend events such as this.

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

Centres usually had systems in place to ensure ongoing reviews. These systems included formal cyclical reviews, where necessary changes were made to the learning environment and materials etc. The internal verification process also included checking assessments and learning materials. Individual staff regularly added and updated learning materials, but there was still a heavy dependence on the learning guides produced for each subject. There was an excellent example where modern and up-to-date examples were being incorporated into teaching. Most centres used the SQA produced assessment support pack, but some centres devised their own assessments and sent them to SQA for prior verification. Further evidence of reviews was apparent in records of meetings, which formed part of the internal quality system.

Category 3: Candidate support

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

Centres had their own selection processes for recruiting candidates. Those that were successful were provided with an induction of varying duration and intensity. They have to complete a first year studying English where they must gain a minimum score for IELTS (or similar) before being able to proceed to the second year. Centres often operated a system of dedicated pastoral care, usually with a student advisor/mentor. In some centres, there were regular timetabled guidance

slots. Centres usually provided access to specialist support services. A major demand of the course is the level of English required and some centres provided excellent ongoing tuition in English throughout the second and third years of the course.

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

Centres timetabled formal slots for the units. Assessors could be contacted out-with class times often by e-mail and WeChat, but sometimes were available at their staff base as well.

Candidates were generally provided with verbal feedback and often with written feedback that varied in length and detail. Feedback was often excellent and detailed. Tutorial records were maintained showing contact between candidates and their tutors and detailing problems and areas discussed. The level of support and contact is a crucial factor in determining the success of an HN award. While this presents investment implications, the results are higher success rates.

Category 4: Internal assessment and verification

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

All centres provided an internal verification (IV) policy and completed IV records. In the main, assessment procedures for the units are fairly straightforward and are well understood, as the units have been long established. The detail contained in the records tended to be very good for this particular verification group. There was often a very good and detailed narrative record of discussions and decisions made. This is a significant step forward from the basic checklist approach, where assessment decisions were accepted with a 'yes or no'. Some records contained explicit actions for future implementation, along with timescales, whilst others would have benefited from taking the narrative and summarising the discussion into specific actions. The work evidenced in the verification reports demonstrated better standardisation of assessment judgements, which meant better outcomes in external verification activity.

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

Centres used SQA produced assessments, or in a number of cases, a locally-devised version based on the SQA assessment exemplar pack. A number of assessments were submitted across the year for prior verification. The assessment instruments were passed through a pre-delivery check, which was recorded in an IV record. There were no records indicating that there were any problems with the SQA assessments, and they were generally accepted as being valid, reliable, equitable and fair. Centres had the most up-to-date unit specification for each unit. Where candidates had justifiable cause, assessment conditions could be adapted to meet those specific needs, and candidates usually could access specialist support.

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

Centres provided a malpractice/plagiarism policy. In most cases candidates had to sign an authenticity declaration, and details of malpractice and plagiarism was normally contained in information provided during induction. The use of electronic checkers was rare, but is becoming more common for units such as *Economics 2: The World Economy*, where the work is completed by open-book. Most centres adhered to the requirement that short candidate notes used in some assessments were collected at the same time as assessment responses. The notes showed that candidates were prepared for all possible parts of an outcome and not just for the requirements being sampled. All evidence reviewed was generated under the conditions set by SQA for these particular units.

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

Centres are familiar with the units and assessments. Where work was judged to be deficient, candidates were asked to re-submit or to be re-assessed. In general, the candidate work was well-judged and the standards had been correctly identified and applied. There is a need for ongoing standardisation exercises to ensure that this continues. The good examples of internal verification were a positive reflection of the candidate work and the assessors' efforts at correctly judging candidate evidence.

Assessors usually provided feedback, sometimes on the scripts or by using checklists, and there were examples of excellent feedback to candidates which demonstrated a significant investment of the part of centres and staff.

Records of meetings suggest there is a growing recognition of the importance of standardisation events/activity in arriving at sound assessment decisions.

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

Centres had a retention policy and retained all candidate evidence in line with retention of candidate evidence requirements. Similarly, the retention of assessment records at most centres complied fully with SQA requirements. Many centres retain candidate evidence for a longer period than required by SQA. All recognised the need for security during storage.

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

Centres in general demonstrated they have an effective process in place to ensure dissemination of feedback from external verification activity. At some centres this took place and was recorded in internal verification records or team meetings. Qualification verification reports were generally available. In each case there was provision within the internal verification system to nominate actions with timescales resulting from a qualification verification event.

Areas of good practice report by qualification verifiers

The following good practice was reported during session 2016–17:

♦ There were examples of excellent and detailed internal verification records where discussions and decisions were detailed.

♦ There was evidence of information from SQA events such as the annual Professional Development Conference being passed to staff who had been unable to attend these events, and also evidence that this information was put into effect.

♦ The level of preparation for the external verification events was very good and a lot of effort had been put in. This was reflected in the outcomes of the events.

♦ There were examples of staff using up-to-date examples in their teaching, which helped bring the subjects to life.

♦ A new SQA centre hired experienced staff from a well-established centre to help establish the course and act as mentors and advisors.

Specific areas for development

The following area for development was reported during session 2016–17:

♦ Where specific actions and decisions are necessary, they should be recorded in the internal verification and standardisation meetings records.