

C ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE NOTES (SQA PROGRAMMES)

- C.1 The university policy and processes for assessment and verification fully align with SQA quality assurance requirements for the university as a single SQA centre. The current SQA guidance documents on assessment and verification are available in the SQA page on the staff intranet (<http://intranet.uhi.ac.uk/academic-support-and-resources/sqa/>) and on SQA's webpage (www.sqa.org.uk). Further guidance is available from each academic partner quality manager.
- C.2 The SQA assessment guidance document is very helpful and identifies principles, modes of assessment, guidance on reassessment and provides examples of best practice. SQA guidance documents of interest to staff (such as the set of quality assurance criteria applied by External Verifiers) have been extracted and placed on the intranet at the reference above. These provide benchmarks for practice and an important resource for staff induction and staff development.
- C.3 The faculties and academic partners provide a clear focus on quality assurance of SQA awards. Academic staff are required to be familiar with, and comply with, defined quality assurance processes. The university and academic partners have developed set procedures and work collaboratively to meet specific SQA requirements in assessment and verification. These procedures are available on the website and in each academic partner's quality manual.
- C.4 The university procedures satisfy SQA national requirements. Some variations exist in assessment procedure across academic partners and these are being reviewed by the Higher National (HN) Project Board as progression boards identify examples. The additional resource of network SQA programme leaders is supporting subject networks as they review how standardised approaches operate at programme level across the partnership. Guidance for staff on assessment and verification criteria and standards is on the staff intranet and is available centrally. This guidance is provided within subject networks and at faculty level, as well as in academic partners.
- C.5 External verification operates in two modes – visiting verification and central (postal) verification. It is managed across the partnership through the role of the SQA co-ordinator located within executive office. This role provides a central point of contact between the university and SQA. The SQA co-ordinator reports on the management of verification via the SQA practitioners group which in turn links into other academic structures such as the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.
- C.6 All academic partners maintain updated lists of staff that are assessors and / or internal verifiers. The quality requirements related to the necessary training and updating of these staff is identified within the SQA quality assurance criteria listed on the staff intranet. Each academic partner is responsible for providing selection, initial induction and further training opportunities to ensure staff are competent in their role(s) and are up-to-date with current SQA assessor and internal verification (IV) requirements.
- C.7 Internal verification in academic partners utilises a standard process and it is managed within a range of academic structures dependent on the organisational structure of each partner. This is being developed in a phased way across the university. Under the leadership of the HN

Operations Committee it is being progressed on a subject network basis for multi-site provision. Appendix G provides staff with information on the internal verification procedure.

- C.8 The assessment of each SQA HN and SVQ unit is allocated to a verification group. Each academic partner quality manager provides guidance and support for staff in relation to all partner management aspects of assessment and IV. Subject network leaders support SQA network PLs and other staff in IV collaborations within subject networks. This aspect is further strengthened through the work of the growing number of network progression boards.
- C.9 There is regular review of assessment and internal verification practice across the partnership. Further guidance on current practice is developed collaboratively and is disseminated using internal and external feedback and through College events, development days and other subject network activities.
- C.10 A log of the outcomes of all external verification (EV) visits (including identification of good practice) is maintained by executive office and is reviewed by Quality Managers and SQA Practitioners Group. The EV reports are regularly updated and are placed on the SQA intranet page, so staff can access this valuable resource of current practice, recommendations and development areas. This activity, and those in the preceding paragraphs, aim to strengthen best practice in a range of aspects of delivery, assessment and quality assurance.
- C.11 At all stages of the assessment process, due consideration is given to the individual needs of the learner as appropriate, taking into account the Equality Act 2010. In the interests of fairness to all students, opportunities for re-assessment must be applied consistently across all academic partners. University policy, in line with SQA recommendation, states that for summative assessment, if the initial outcome is not successful, normally one re-assessment attempt should be provided. There are exceptions to this and the university seeks to address these exceptions through careful consideration of mitigating circumstances particularly at network progression board meetings. Further guidance on re-assessment attempts and other aspects, eg remediation is provided within the SQA page on the staff intranet
- C.12 Fairness and transparency of process in assessment is important and SQA requires that the assessor and IV are responsible for ensuring that there is no potential for a conflict of interest to arise when learners are undertaking an assessment. If a potential conflict of interest from the assessor or IV is identified, the assessor or IV must bring this to the attention of the line manager. The line manager will carry out action to neutralize any conflict of interest. This could involve changing the arrangements for assessment or IV of a learner or group of learners, so that no single member of staff with a personal interest in the outcome of the assessment is solely involved in the assessment and/or verification process.
- C.13 Passing an assessment first time, within a criterion-referenced assessment framework is not a condition of an SQA award and no additional penalty should apply for a re-assessment. This applies equally in assessment of HN graded units and particular care should be taken by staff to ensure that all grades reflect the assessment grade requirements of the unit specification, with no additional requirement added - such as "must be passed at first attempt for a specific grade" etc.

- C.14 Assessment arrangements for students with additional support needs have been developed by SQA to meet fairness requirements. A link to recommended procedures for supporting best practice in such assessment arrangements is provided on the staff intranet (see paragraph C.1 link above).
- C.15 If a student has passed a graded unit (GU) and then wishes to use the re-assessment opportunity to achieve a higher grade (eg to meet a course admissions requirement) this is clearly possible under SQA guidance, as long as the assessment employs a significantly different project or a completely new examination. The amount of student effort required to undertake a new graded unit project in the remaining time in the term means this is an unlikely scenario. As assessment issues arise the professional judgement will be required with the guiding principle being fairness to students. Quality managers and subject network leaders will consider such issues as they emerge and seek to adopt an equivalent position across the university.
- C.16 The EV coordination of SQA Graded Unit examinations is managed through the SQA centre coordinator. It is an important principle for the university that all SQA GU examinations (including re-sit examinations) are prior verified (PV) by SQA before being implemented. This is essential as some aspects of GU examinations have been problematic in the past and remediation of these key units may be difficult to address at a late stage in the session. Guidance on prior verification arrangements is available through the College quality manager and documentation to submit a PV request is listed on the SQA intranet page.
- C.17 Faculties and subject networks have an important role in collaborative quality development of SQA provision across the university. Through the work of network programme leaders and the network SQA programme leader initiative, subject networks are expanding their capacity to address quality issues within the network. Quality managers are working closely with subject networks to develop a shared view of network assessment and verification practice.

Assessment process for SQA graded unit assessments

- C.18 These arrangements apply only to the final Graded Unit Assessments taken under examination conditions. Arrangements for practice examinations and for other Graded Unit Assessments, eg projects, will be made within subject networks.
- C.19 The main deadlines arise from SQA requirements for prior external verification of the assessment instrument and external verification of marked work. All GUs delivered across the university will be administered to the same deadlines, irrespective of whether the assessment is sent to SQA for prior external verification and whether the unit is selected for external verification. This will help to avoid last-minute arrangements after SQA has identified which units are to be externally verified.
- C.20 Examination GUs will be taken during May each year. This is late enough for students to have covered sufficient work and early enough to allow for marking, internal verification and re-sits before the end of session.
- C.21 It will be possible to make arrangements for GUs to be taken out with the schedule if required.
- C.22 The arrangements allow for a choice of marking and internal verification models.

- C.23 Assessments can be marked where the students sat the assessment (or posted to the marker) and then sent on to the internal verifier. Assessments to be marked and verified using this model should be taken earlier in the diet to allow for posting time.
- C.24 Assessments can be posted or taken to a meeting at which both marking and internal verification can be achieved. This model may allow the assessment to be taken later in the diet.
- C.25 Re-sits will be scheduled to take place during the term wherever possible. Re-sit papers should be prepared along with other papers, and held in case they are needed.
- C.26 The key dates associated with these arrangements are as shown in the table below.

SQA Graded Units timeline:

Week	Task	Responsibility
Semester 1: Week 5	All HN graded unit exam units to be entered in SITS.	Academic partners
Semester 1: Week 6	Start production of main and re-sit exam papers. Teams developing papers for the first time contact their QM regarding support, such as requesting an EV development visit request or collaboration with peers in other areas who have experience and expertise to offer.	Delivering team led by SQA programme leader (SQA PL) or subject network leader (SNL) where no SQA PL is in place.
Semester 1: Week 10	All active HNs with a graded unit (exam) to be identified.	Academic Directorate (SR)
Semester 1: Week 16 (at latest)	Papers to be sent to SQA for prior verification. Academic Directorate (SR) to be informed of papers that have been sent and when.	SQA PL or SNL where no SQA PL is in place and AP quality manager.
Semester 1: Week 17	Set exam and re-sit dates.	SQA PL or SNL where no SQA PL is in place.
Semester 2: Week 2	Prepare exam attendance registers by identifying all students (name and number) taking graded unit and at which sites they are based.	SNL / SQA PL / programme team.
Semester 2: Week 2	Agree exam papers to be used (where courses are provided with a bank of papers that have been prior verified by SQA).	SNL / SQA PL/ programme team.

Week	Task	Responsibility
Semester 2: Week 7	All amendments required by the prior verification service are actioned.	SNL / SQA PL / programme team.
Semester 2: Week 7	The papers should be in their finalised format, i.e. ready to be issued with no further checking, editing or amendment taking place. Specific instruction, e.g. the need for graph paper to be issued, should be included.	SNL or SQA PL.
Semester 2: Week 7	Room bookings to be made in each academic partner.	SQA PL or SNL where no SQA PL is in place, with the assistance of the lecturer with responsibility for the exam in the AP.
Semester 2: Week 14/15	Graded unit exams take place.	Programme team
Semester 2: Week 14 onwards	First and second marking occurs. Candidates who need to re-sit are identified and informed.	Programme team.
Semester 2: Week 16/17	Collation of results and evidence for SQA.	SQA team and AP quality unit
Semester 2: Week 18 (2 June)*	SQA pick up sample of completed evidence.	SQA
9-20 June*	SQA external verification.	SQA
End June onwards	EV feedback received from SQA and disseminated to academic partners.	Academic Directorate (SR)

SQA DATA ENTRY

- C.27 SQA student entries (group awards and units) for full-time and part-time students starting in September to be entered by all academic partners by 1 December at the latest.
- C.28 All student entries for part-time students entering after September to be entered by academic partners within six weeks of starting the programme.
- C.29 All student entries for semester 2 to be entered within six weeks of starting the programme.
- C.30 All results due to complete within the academic session to be entered by academic partners by 1 August (in the small number of cases where post-summer HN re-sits are involved, results should be completed and entered within two weeks of the September start of the programme).