



Vocationally Related Qualification

Counselling

Specification 0505, 0510, 0515

Coursework Verification 2006/2007

Report on the Examination

2007 examination - June series

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Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

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Verification 2006/2007

INTRODUCTION

64 centres entered candidates for VRQ courses in the summer of 2007.

8 External verifiers monitored the internal assessment of candidates at these centres.

The Chief External verifier reported that this was a successful year for verifiers; she is encouraged by the external verifier's positive response to the issues that were identified in her previous report. She noted that the team is now engaging more effectively with the new external verifying procedures and that this was having a noticeable affect on the quality and consistency of their feedback and communication with centres. She is confident that verified coursework results for the January and June 2007 examination series are completely reliable.

This report will address the verification of both level 2 and level 3 coursework, level 5 coursework is omitted because it was not included in the external verifiers remit and the few centres currently offering it have been given special attention by senior members of the examining team.

The external verification experience has shown that there are significant differences in both the style and substance of counselling courses across the different centres and also in the quality arrangements of internal assessment. Differences in style and substance reflect the unique and diverse nature of different types of centres, individual tutors, counselling approaches and of the diverse nature of the counselling sector generally. The fact that AQA's system is able to cope so well in this environment is testament to its suitability for the purpose.

Differences in the quality arrangements of internal assessment relate to the different ways centres manage their tutors, go about quality assurance and comply to AQA's regulations.

The reports show that most centres have a good grasp of what is needed and have in place adequate QA systems for the purpose.

Some other centre's level of assurance was less convincing and the external verifier needed to seek clarification and/or further assurances and if necessary gave courses only conditional approval.

Internal standardisation

Internal standardisation is needed, whenever two or more tutors are employed by a centre to assess AQA counselling units at the same level, to ensure consistency of internal standards.

The verifiers reported that, in general, most centres are now showing stronger commitment to consistency of internal standards and do employ effective systems to manage internal standards.

Verifiers report that some centres, particularly those where the courses are taught by part-time tutors, find internal standardisation more difficult to manage. In the future external verifiers will not approve a centre unless it has suitable arrangements for internal standardisation in place.

External standardisation

External standardisation training is provided by AQA in October and February each year. It is mandatory for all new tutors and tutors who have not attended a meeting in the preceding two years.

External standardisation focuses on competences and maintaining competence in AQA assessment processes. The meetings are a key source of essential information for tutors about developments and changes in AQA assessment over time.

Centres are accountable for the competence of their tutors to teach and assess candidates on AQA courses.

EV reports have identified that some non-standardised tutors are teaching AQA courses. Centres must arrange for these tutors to be standardised as soon as possible, non standardised tutors cannot be responsible for the internal assessment of coursework and EVs will not approve their centre marks.

Interim arrangements to enable a course to continue in the short term may be agreed with the external verifier before the candidates are finally assessed.

The moderation of coursework

Coursework, comprising both written and practical assessments are conducted by tutors at the centre. These are moderated and verified by an external verifier.

For written work, samples are taken from each centre twice at each level. The first samples are taken early in the course and the second samples near the end.

The centre provides the EV with the list of candidates taking level 2 and level 3 units and the EV selects the candidates to be included in the sample.

External verifiers reported that sampling this year was very successful and that all of the tutors co-operated fully in the process. There were some cases where external verifiers could not agree the tutor's assessment, in which case feedback including an explanation and instructions on how to correct the error was given and an additional sample was taken later to ensure that the instructions had been carried out. In every case reported the second sample proved satisfactory.

For the verification of practical skills assessment, external verifiers attend a proportion of practical skill assessment sessions, observe the process and report on the outcomes.

In most cases EVs found that standards of practical skills assessment was good and followed the AQA guidance.

Some centres however, did not follow AQA's guidance and the EV needed to intervene.

Centre Marks

For each examination series AQA sends out Centre Mark Forms (CMF) to centres to collect the centre's marks for each unit it has entered candidates for. These forms and specific instructions how to fill them in, are sent out to centres 4 to 6 weeks before the coursework mark deadline. The CMF complete with other assessment documents is sent to the EV for approval.

A significant number of centres failed either to complete the CMF correctly and/or send it to the EV on time.

It is important that centres follow the instructions and get their CMFs in on time, failure to do so could prevent students from getting their results on results day and even from getting a certificate.

In conclusion

We can conclude that generally the external verification process for counselling courses has been successful; the system has provided a good level assurance that the grades for counselling units are reliable.

However, not all of the external verifiers have been able to complete all of the verification process for all of their allocated centres. Incomplete verification increases the risk of inaccurate assessment and we must redouble our effort to ensure the process is completed and take prompt action to maintain or improve the quality of counselling courses at our centres.

It is clear from external verifiers' reports that most centres are providing high quality counselling courses which more than adequately address AQA's learning outcomes. Most centres are well managed, have good management systems and a good understanding of AQA's regulations and systems. However, a small minority of AQA centres have shown weaknesses in their management of AQA counselling courses. In some cases individual tutors are isolated, ill informed and poorly supported by their centre.

In the future the external verifiers must take a stronger line on tutor standardisation and on maintaining dialogue with centre's nominated single point of contact.