# SQA CERTIFICATION DURING COVID-19

## Introduction

Colleges Scotland welcomes dialogue with SQA in regard to student certification in light of the disruption caused by COVID-19.

We are keen to help develop a credible certification model for this academic year that recognises both the operational difficulties we are working under as well as the distinct challenges that the variety of learners face due to the variety of assessment models in the College sector.

The Cabinet Secretary outlined an approach to assessment for Scotland's schools based on 'course work, prior attainment and teacher estimates'. We support this direction and would like to be assured that a similar approach will be developed for colleges. An approach that combines regulatory flexibility alongside a recognition of the variety and complexity of assessment types used in Colleges is necessary.

This paper set out a series of principles for the college sector and suggests an approach for some of the main qualifications offered by Scottish Qualification Authority. It is recognised that there is a further piece of work to ensure consistency with all awarding bodies certificating college students.

## Overriding Principles

All arrangements and decisions reached in respect of exceptional assessment processes for college candidates must recognise and support the unprecedented situation facing our learners. The arrangements proposed strike an appropriate and reasonable balance between recognising and certificating learner attainment and maintaining appropriate standards. These are, however, not normal times and as a result the previous arrangements and requirements will no longer meet learner, centre or awarding body needs.

In developing these proposals, the following points are noted.

- Colleges are experienced, trusted and trustworthy institutions that are able to utilise and apply professional judgement and evidence to deliver fair and reasonable outcomes for our learners.
- Colleges have robust, mature and embedded quality systems.
- Assessment judgements should draw on the full range of candidate evidence available. This includes additional assessment evidence, work completed to date, formative assessments, witnessed work, previous outcomes and part-completed work. By utilising this holistic approach, learners can be recognised for their hard work and learning, and appropriate academic standards maintained
- Students journeys should not be impacted after face to face contact has stopped.
- There is equity for all college students. College students have challenges in accessing technology, fulfilling caring roles, are or have been care experienced and may be from MD areas of Scotland.
- That students have opportunity to submit evidence until the end of the academic year, however where students have significant barriers to learning staff judgement is utilised.

## External Verification

Colleges Scotland are making a formal request that external verification activities for colleges be stood down for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic session. In making this request, centres will ensure that internal verification arrangements continue to be robust and that standardisation needs are met.

## Student Progression

The progression of 2019/20 learners are of key importance, colleges, universities, employers and government must work in partnership to ensure that this year's cohort are not disadvantaged. To support this:

- Colleges will honour students progression where there is evidence of working towards a pass
- College will ensure there is time at the start of the new academic session to refresh and update skill for progressing learners where necessary
- Universities must work in partnership and adapt entry requirements accordingly
- Government will encourage and support partnership working and smooth transition for learners between sectors
- Learners who require specialist registration may need this to be conditional on a final sign off during their employment by either an expert witness or independent assessment. Colleges will need to work with these specific bodies to ensure consistency.
- Those who require specific exam passes for vendor qualifications (i.e. CISCO) may still be able to do this online, this may not affect the overall FT award and progression.

## Resulting

As the assessing body, colleges will result learners through their normal arrangements (where possible), with certification undertaken by SQA in line with normal arrangements (where possible).

## Principles of Assessment -

The following principles of quality assurance and assessment should exist to the end of the academic year –

- utilising existing significant student assessment work which demonstrate competence
- using Lecturers judgements, Lecturers are part of course teams that are competent in judging student performance over an academic year
- altering conditions of assessment
- focussed at outcome level for qualifications rather than evidence requirements
- colleges maintain mature and robust internal quality systems

## Generating Candidate Evidence

For each unit and/or group award, where full evidence has not yet been achieved, Centres must consider alternative candidate evidence for the relevant qualification. Staff making assessment judgements based on alternative evidence must consider a range of candidate evidence with strong predictive value. Centres are encouraged to seek a range of alternative academic evidence for consideration and not solely a single assessment piece or source, this may result in making professional decisions which infer student competence.

- Evidence should be pulled together from a variety of sources. This may be evidence which has already been generated or may involve assessors providing learners with additional and alternative opportunities to demonstrate their competence, knowledge and understanding through a range of reasonable and practicable alternative activities (e.g. open book essay or

report writing in lieu of closed book, assessment video observation, time-limited assessments, and professional discussion).
- New evidence generated should only be from key Outcomes of learning that underpin a qualification. This may be limited in the current context as UK conditions in relation to COVID-19 change.
- The evidence must demonstrate coverage of the outcomes of learning. Where possible, this should also reflect the evidence requirements outlined within the Unit Specification, but flexibility around this will be necessary and staff and Centres must ensure that they are acting reasonably and consistently in the circumstances in adopting alternative approaches of evidence gathering.
- There must be a balance to be met between the need to demonstrate that candidate work is in line with the national standards and the unique circumstances of the current situation. This may require a holistic approach to assessment decision making.

Once these decisions have been reached, and endorsed by the Internal Verifier, candidate results will be submitted to SQA through normal resulting procedures.

The following are examples of the types of candidate materials that could be considered to generate evidence for key outcomes of learning –

- **Remote testing (this could be paper based, app based, online, audio, video):** This should contain content to assess skills, knowledge and understanding which is outlined in the Unit Specification and should include sufficient challenge and application to demonstrate the appropriate level of attainment.

- **Coursework:** This may comprise a variety of evidence and may have occurred naturally, under differing conditions. Nevertheless, if these conditions are made clear, attainment under closed book conditions may be predictable on the basis of coursework. The best prediction will be based on comprehensive assessment information covering all areas assessed. This does not necessarily mean that every topic in every area needs to be assessed exhaustively. A selection of important and representative questions can give a good indication of likely performance.

- **Cross-assessing with other units:** evidence gathered from assessment in other units undertaken by candidates is likely to include content which can be used to contribute more widely to meet assessment criteria elsewhere.

- **Professional Discussion:** using and recording professional discussion between a candidate and an assessor focusing on, and enhancing, evidence already provided or demonstrated by the candidate - including real work activities, practical tasks, a case study, project, portfolio or some other form of assessment.

- **Graded Units** that are incomplete and where further progress is not possible, may be estimated, alongside other candidate evidence, based on progress and achievement to date.

- **Practical assessment:** Where possible, evidence may be assessed using remote assessment (video, photographic, portfolio, witness testimony), alongside work already demonstrated and assessed. Where practical assessment criteria cannot be met in full for a unit, assessors should make professional judgement on the holistic assessment evidence available.

## College Qualifications – how might this work?

| Qualification Type | Format | Student | Assessment evidence | Risks | Mitigation | Possible solution |
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| **Local NQ qualifications**<br><br>**NC group awards** | Individual SQA units which are assessed<br><br>NC group awards – 12 SQA credits are required | Majority of students progress within the college to study at a higher SCQF level | Evidence exists for qualification, however not for all outcomes of learning | • Conditions of assessment<br>• Resources required for assessment | Internal verification takes place in line with college policy | • Outcomes of learning across the course are examined to identify if they have been met and Lecturers estimate individual student success.<br>• Where outcomes have not been met existing evidence is examined to determine if this provides assessment evidence or an appropriate key assessment piece is devised and used to gather evidence. |
| **Skills for Work** | SfW group award with mandatory and optional units | Students are in a college or school setting | Evidence exists for qualification, however not for all outcomes of learning | • Conditions of assessment<br>• Assessment environment | Internal verification takes place in line with college policy | • Where students are in a final year the outcomes of learning across the course are examined to identify if they have been met and Lecturers estimate individual student success.<br>• Where students are in their first year of study an appropriate significant key piece of assessment is used to gather evidence to determine a pass. |

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| **Higher National Certificates**<br><br>**Higher National Diplomas Year 1** | HNC group awards – 12 SQA credits are required, however students often study 15 SQA credits. | Students progress to employment, further study or university. | Evidence exists for qualification, however not for all outcomes of learning | • Conditions of assessment<br>• Resources required for assessment<br>• Placement is required by some regulators | Internal verification takes place in line with college policy | • Outcomes of learning across the HNC are examined to identify if they have been met and Lecturers estimate individual student success.<br>• The graded unit becomes the main focus to determine competence. Where necessary conditions of assessment are varied.<br>• Registration with regulators is conditional on assessment when in employment. |
| **Higher National Diplomas Year 2** | HND group awards – 30 SQA credits are required, however students often study 15 SQA credits. | Students progress to employment, further study or in the main university. | Evidence exists for qualification, however not for all outcomes of learning | • Conditions of assessment<br>• Resources required for assessment<br>• Placement is required by some regulators | Internal verification takes place in line with college policy | • Outcomes of learning across the HND are examined to identify if they have been met and Lecturers estimate individual student success.<br>• The Year 2 graded unit becomes the main focus to determine competence. Where necessary conditions of assessment are varied.<br>• Registration with regulators is conditional on assessment when in employment. |

Colleges Scotland
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