COVID -19 CONTINGENCY PLANNING March 2020

COLLEGE HN CONTINGENCY

a. Current Position

Background

Quality assurance is an essential part of our qualifications system that allows us to ensure the quality, consistency and integrity of certification across all centres.

HN/VQ quality assurance encompasses centre and qualifications approval, as well as verifying that qualifications have been delivered to standard across approx. 1200 centres across the world.

For this session, we have approximately 1200 outstanding qualification verification activities for Scotland's Colleges, 1200 for Scottish ETPs, 345 in RoUK, 233 in China and 23 internationally. These activities include all product types outwith our NQ portfolio. SQA operate a risk based, intelligence led, selection system and verification activities are carried out in areas of highest risk.

We are regulated by SQA Accreditation in Scotland for our SVQ and other licence to practice qualifications, to date we have had no communication from them on changing our approach to QA. Ofqual, our regulator in RoUK market, has provided us with guidance on what they expect of awarding bodies in the current circumstances, including asking centres to delay assessment and therefore, no certification should be made. Our HN product is self regulated.

Given the recent announcements regarding school closure and exams not running in 2020, together with the level of QA that we undertake and the importance placed upon it, it is not surprising that we have had queries from individual colleges and college sector representatives for clarification on what the arrangements are, particularly for the following areas:

- Closed book assessment
- Practical assessments
- Graded Units
- External Verification

We have been liaising with the College Principal Forum via Colleges Scotland and they have provided SQA with a paper on our suggested approach for college candidates at this time, appendix A. Scotland's Colleges view, in brief, is that SQA should ensure college assessments will be treated with equity to the school sector and that the same principles will be used for certification. This is based on the assumption that SQA will not be delaying certification for HN candidates and that colleges should use their own professional judgement on suitable conditions of assessment and grades. This approach is 'hands off' which would see SQA stepping away from our quality assurance procedures entirely and allowing colleges autonomy in resulting decisions. A SQA HNVQ Contingency Group, consisting of colleagues from Ops, QD, Comms and Appointee Management, is in place and a short life working group considered a number of alternative options, Appendix B. This group is to meet again this week to further explore options.

A number of Scottish colleges have already communicated to us that they will not be providing us with any evidence to be reviewed remotely and that they are considering external verification has been stood down in these exceptional circumstances. This stance is in line with the college principal's recommendations. We require to review urgently how, and if, we are quality assuring HN products in Scotland's Colleges for the remainder of this academic session. When doing this we need to balance being fair to learners and supporting the secure delivery of our qualifications with

maintaining the wellbeing and safety of our appointees and people in centres and SQA, many of whom will be affected directly and indirectly with the impact of Covid-19.

Scotland's Colleges operate different models of course delivery and candidates will all be at different stages of qualification completion. Those that deliver over two sessions are likely to be further ahead than those operating a three session model, for example.

The purpose of this paper is to consider options available for SQA for the remainder of this academic session. Current plans to move most of the qualification verification to remote, will only be successful if we are able to access the evidence from colleges whose buildings are now closed.

Any changes to approach for SVQs and other regulated qualifications are subject to approval by sector bodies and the regulator. We are currently working through a set of key questions for all sector bodies which QMs will pose and record to get a greater understanding of any changes to assessment strategies to help aid centres in the current climate. A communication is prepared seeking further guidance from all of our regulators, which will come to CoPGG for appropriate approval. Although SVQs are delivered by ETPs on a rolling basis, Colleges tend to deliver these in a sessional timeline. We are in discussion with SDS on the impact on FAs and MAs.

Also for noting, as part of our contingency work, options are being explored for the certification of HN and VQ candidates as group award certificates are currently dependent on our internal print room staff. Any changes to HN processes should also be considered for ETPs who are delivering in this space in the domestic market. Some HNs are run in partnership with sector bodies, for example, General Dental Council, we are discussing plans with these organisations, however, early indication suggests they are inclined to hold certification until later in the year when closed book assessment can take place.

Options

Option 1

Move all closed book and practical assessments until later in the year, when colleges re-open. This will allow for remote qualification verification activity and for conditions of assessment to be upheld.

This option above is based on the following assumptions: -

- We are not committing to certificating HN candidates in August.
- Universities are delaying their intake of candidates until January.
- Colleges are willing to work with us on changes to timelines.
- Colleges will re-open after the summer break.
- Colleges provide us evidence to verify remotely.

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The following options have been split into areas of concern, it is possible that an overall approach may include a combination of approaches.

These are based on the following assumption:

- We are committing to certificating HN candidates in August.
- None of the options impact regulated qualifications.
- Colleges will continue to carry out internal verification and other quality assurance processes to college policy.
- Colleges will ensure authentication of candidate evidence.

Options – Graded units, closed book and practical assessment

Option A SQA provide advice to centres on practicable alternative activities for each qualification e.g. open book essay or report writing in lieu of closed book, assessment video observation, time-limited assessments, and professional discussion.

Considerations This would would require a considerable workload on Qualification Managers and teams. It would, however, provide a consistency of approach and maintenance of national standard.

Option B SQA allow colleges to use professional judgement on changes to conditions of assessment e.g. open book essay or report writing in lieu of closed book, assessment video observation, time-limited assessments, and professional discussion

Considerations This would mean inconsistency across the sector and undermines the national standard and had the potential to breaches in instrument of assessment and cause long term implications on the integrity of assessments. This is the preferred college principal's approach.

Option C SQA do not allow changes to conditions of assessment

Considerations This will undoubtedly result in candidates not being complete by the end of session and being unable to be certificated.

Option D Where graded units are incomplete and where further progress is not possible, may be estimated, alongside other candidate evidence, based on progress and achievement to date at the college's discretion.

Considerations Processes for appeals would require to be considered by SQA and colleges. This is akin to our approach to NQ. This is preferred by college principals.

Option E 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.

Considerations This would mean inconsistency across the sector and undermines the national standard. This is the preferred college principal's approach.

Options – External Verification

Option F SQA does not carry out external verification for HN in colleges (consideration required for other centre types delivering HN)

Considerations The role of the awarding body is undermined. This is the preferred college principal approach.

Option G SQA continues to work with colleges to ask them to provide HN evidence remotely where available and practicable.

Considerations This is only possible if evidence is available and colleges confirm this. Paper evidence is unavailable due to college closures. Possible issues with equity and fairness across the sector.

Options – Partial completion of units

Option H Colleges review outcomes of learning across the HN to identify if they have been met and Lecturers estimate individual student success. The graded unit becomes the focus to determine competence (note the GU may be under revised conditions of assessment).

Considerations Some units will have been completed in full. Guidance may be required on when this would be appropriate to use. This is the college principals preferred approach.

Option I Colleges continue to require all outcomes and units to be completed.

Considerations This may not be possible, resulting in candidates not being certificated for their award.

Further Considerations

College colleagues are under significant pressure to move teaching and learning to remote, where possible.

Remote learning may not be possible for some candidates due to lack of technology, carer duties etc.

As all college staff are now at home, it may be the case that, on a large scale, remote verification is not possible.

The only option we have to stop certification, should we need to, is by placing a block on colleges entering and resulting across all qualifications they are approved to deliver.

Recommendation

It is recommended that SQA provide advice to centres on practicable alternative activities for each qualification e.g. open book essay or report writing in lieu of closed book, assessment video observation, time-limited assessments, and professional discussion. (option a).

In recognition that some candidates are not able to complete their graded units, these may be estimated, alongside other candidate evidence, based on progress and achievement to date at the college's discretion. The need for this is anticipated to be in small numbers, however, we require to get a clearer picture on this from colleges and develop guidelines if we are to implement. (option D).

For external verification activity, it is recommended that SQA continues to work with colleges to ask them to provide HN evidence remotely where available and practicable (option G).

It is further recommended that Colleges continue to require all outcomes and units to be completed (option I). Exceptional circumstances may be considered on a case by case basis, however, this would need further thought.