COVID -19 CONTINGENCY PLANNING March 2020

NQ QUALITY ASSURANCE

This paper was updated 23 March following COPGG meeting. Updates shown in red.

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.

NQ quality assurance encompasses centre and qualifications approval, as well as verifying that qualifications have been delivered to standard.

Over the past few years, we have made the NQ QA approach more robust, taking an intelligence led and risked based approach, while increasing the number of random selections. Overall, this has meant that the number of verification activities has increased 35% since 2017.

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 centres and Local Authorities looking for clarification on what QA activity will take place. Also, some centres have requested no verification in certain subjects and at least one college has requested no NQ verification at all. Some visiting verifiers have withdrawn their services from verification over the past week.

Therefore, we need to review urgently how we will quality assure national qualifications 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 national 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. Teachers and lecturers will be working towards finishing units and courses and ensuring that candidates compete their coursework. We need to be mindful that they will be doing this against a potential backdrop of increasing staff absences.

The purpose of this paper is to consider options available for QA for the remainder of this academic session. Data regarding the current situation (as at 20/03/20) with regards to verification and approvals is given in the appendix. The option of undertaking all visiting and event verification as currently planned and attempting to do this by remote means is not included due to the logistics for centre and SQA staff, the risk of materials going missing in the post and the uncertainty of having resource to do this. Also, there could be the potential for large scale “not accepted” outcomes to be unresolved if centres have difficulty getting further evidence and/or appointee resource becomes unavailable.

It must be noted that approximately 30% of activity has already taken place in session 19/20 and outcome reports published.

Options/over

Options

The options below are based on the following assumptions

- N4 courses will be assessed and results entered
- SCQF level 5, 6 and 7 units will be assessed and results entered
- The above assumptions were made on the basis that the DFM announcement on 19 March instructed schools to ensure that outstanding units and courses were assessed. However, the instruction given on 22 March that candidates must not go to school to complete coursework means this assumption may now not be valid.
- We can now assume that some units and courses will not be assessed and resulted as they will not be able to be undertaken at home, for example practical based subjects and those that have highly supervised assessment conditions.
- There is the assumption that some IACCAs may not be completed due to the nature of their assessment.
- It is assumed that centres will not result N4 course or SCQF level 5, 6 and 7 units without evidence to support

- N4 course and SCQF level 5, 6 and 7 units results will be awarded at same time as N5, H and AH courses
  No dependency when N4 courses and SCQF level units can be awarded in relation to awarding of N5, H and AH

- free standing units at SCQF level 5, 6 and 7 and N4 course entries will not change

  Unable to predict how centres will behave with regards to changes to course and unit entries, especially at N4/N5. May observe an increase in N4 entries or N5 entries, with corresponding decrease at the other level.

- With schools closed, it is unlikely that materials for verification will be available for uplift/sending in to SQA for verification. This differs in relation to HNVQ where colleges/ETPs are better set up to assess digitally and so submit materials electronically for verification.
  The decisions taken for the approach to verification for HNVQ and NQ will require considered communication to reflect the reasons for any differences.
- Centres will resume in the autumn term

Option 1

Undertake no further QA activity and move all outstanding selections to session 20/21

This will include:

- All remaining visiting verification for units, IACCAs, SfW and Awards
- All R2 events for unit and IACCA,
- All postal and remote (digital) verification
- All approvals – unless able to be desk approved

Considerations of this option:

Lowers risk of overburdening teachers and lecturers at this unprecedented time

Enables teachers and lecturers to focus on completing units, courses and coursework

Sends out a message to centres that QA of internal assessment is not high priority and that internally assessed qualifications are not held in same esteem as those assessed externally

If centres know there is no further activity, it will reduce internal verification activity

Could lead to centres resulting when they have no/insufficient evidence to support

Centres who remain on hold from R1 and visiting verification will not have candidates certificated

No verification of IACCAs which is a non-question paper component that will be used in the alternative awarding model to determine overall grades.

Communications to centres and appointees required

Option 2

Postpone all current QA activity and reschedule some activity when schools and colleges resume timetabled classes and at a time that does not overload centres given some may be involved in post certification appeals.

This will include postponing:

- All remaining visiting verification for units, IACCAs, SfW and Awards
- All R2 events for unit and IACCA
- All postal and remote (digital) verification
- All approvals – unless able to be desk approved

Verification activity for any identified high and medium risk category selections can be rescheduled and combined with (or potentially replace) planned post certification activity in September/October. Centres can be made aware that some QA activity will take place without specifying what sample will be involved and when it will take place, other than it will be in the autumn term. In this way a lighter sampling of units, for example across N4 AVU, can be made at an appropriate time

Any low risk category selections can be moved into session 20/21 and verified on evidence produced in 20/21

Any centres with outstanding Not Accepted outcomes can be followed up, as this is remote activity, and assuming appointee resource and evidence is available Given centres are now closed, follow up activity will resume when centres reopen.

Considerations of this option:

Lowers risk of overburdening teachers and lecturers at this unprecedented time

Enables teachers and lecturers to focus on completing units, courses and coursework

Sends out a message to centres that QA of internal assessed qualifications is important

Lowers the risk of reduced centre internal verification activity

Lowers the risk that centres will result when they have no/insufficient evidence to support

Centres who remain on hold from R1 and visiting verification will not have candidates certificated

No verification of IACCAs which is a non-question paper component that will be used in the alternative awarding model to determine overall grades.

Need to consider approach if a centre was found not to meet national standard during activity in Sept/Oct and candidates have been certificated

If the assumption that units have been resulted and certificated is not correct, then any QA activity in Sept/Oct will not be retrospective, but “live” and holds can be put in place

Communications to centres and appointees required, including need to retain evidence after 30 September

RECOMMENDATION

Option 2 is recommended with changes

Appendix

Current situation

Verification

- 674 activities have already taken place and outcome reports published (30% of total planned activity)
- We have 1814 outstanding QV activities (including SfW and Awards). c1590 with school sector, c180 with Scotland's Colleges and c60 with ETPs.
- We have 528 IACCA and 1043 units still to be verified
- We have 481 visiting verification visits outstanding - 119 in March, 99 in April, 218 in May, 45 dates not yet set
- We have 40 standardisation and 43 central events planned for end April and May 2020
- We have 21 follow up activities in progress (material received, with SQA or Appointees)
- We have some remote verification capability (German, Urdu and Italian speaking component)
- There are currently 38,119 candidates on the UCAS data exchange document. This includes candidates completing NQ. There is no NQ candidate affected by any hold remaining in the system

Approval

- There are currently 2 visits planned (27 March and 1 May)