Availability of Coursework Evidence and Estimate Data and COVID - 19

Question – how can SQA receive and assess Coursework evidence and estimate data to inform the awarding process in the event of school and college closures?

In Autumn 2019, SQA published a number of key dates to schools and colleges advising on the uplift arrangements for coursework evidence at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher and the date of submission for estimate data.

For a number of reasons, schools will set their own internal deadlines for their candidates/ school departments. The first uplift is on 18 March (most Nat 5 subjects with exceptions uplifted in April), Higher and Adv Higher is on 23 April (with some exceptions uplifted in May). The last uplift is on 28 May for Advanced Higher Art & Design which has no exam component.

The deadline for estimate data is 24 April.

Where practicable and reasonable, SQA will agree a small number of requests for extensions to coursework uplift dates, for example fires resulting in the loss of access to school buildings.

It should be noted that schools in four local authorities close schools on 27 March for two weeks, remainder close on 3 April until 20 April, coinciding with the same week of the current published uplift date for most Highers and Advanced Highers of 23 April and deadline for estimate data of 24 April.

Challenges and options:

In the event that SQA invokes a technical statistical approach to awarding grades, the marking of coursework evidence and estimate data are considered essential components of the data set upon which decisions will be made.

It should be noted that not all courses have coursework, for example Higher Mathematics, but as it stands nor do all courses have exams, for example Adv Higher Art & Design.

It should be highlighted that although there is a requirement of the Exceptional Circumstances pre-certification service to submit estimates, not all centres submit such data for their candidates. This should be strongly encouraged.

Whilst a significant amount of material for Nat 5 will be uplifted on 18 March, a number of schools have closed and asked for extensions to the uplift dates.

All other coursework and a volume of estimate data is outstanding. Uplifts or materials sent by centres will depend on postal services operating as normal.

Should airports and ports close, this will have significant impact on uplifts (and deliveries) across Highlands and Islands.

Option 1 – Bring forward the dates for coursework and estimates

Feasibility and risks: Could be done. Risks include perceived unfairness amongst candidates who believed they had more time to complete according to published timelines and/or candidates are disadvantaged as evidence remains incomplete. Centres may not have the capacity to provide evidence in a truncated timeline. Higher risk of coursework evidence being incomplete or in a poor condition and SQA is unable to liaise with centres.

Assumptions:

- Candidates have completed the coursework
- Some coursework is better than no coursework
- If incomplete, candidates and schools have the capacity to complete at home or in school depending on the assessment conditions for the coursework.
- Coursework evidence can be sourced in schools and presented for all candidates as required
- Schools have reached decisions about estimates based on normal ways of reaching those decisions
- Courier supplier can accommodate the revised earlier uplift arrangement.
- SQA is able to accommodate earlier uplift date.

Option 2 –Work to existing uplift arrangements

Feasibility and risk: Can be done. There are risks associated with current published timelines, including ongoing disruption and stress leading to errors, incomplete evidence and estimates data. Centres might be unwilling to enter buildings to source evidence and data for submission as required. Risk remains of coursework evidence being incomplete or in a poor condition and SQA is unable to liaise with centres.

Assumptions:

- Candidates can complete the coursework by due dates
- There are no barriers preventing the completion of coursework evidence, for example resources or conditions of coursework assessment.
- Estimate data will be complete, has been arrived at in the normal way and available by the due date
- Where coursework and estimate is outstanding, schools and colleges will have access to buildings to source and present evidence and data as required.
- Courier supplier and SQA are able to maintain levels of service required to uplift and handle coursework evidence.

Option 3 – Agree a final single date for the remainder of all outstanding coursework evidence and estimate data (notionally end of first week in May)

Feasibility and risk: Could be done. There are risks associated with a final single date, including ongoing disruption and stress leading to errors, incomplete coursework evidence and estimates data, perceived unfairness amongst candidates who have already completed and/or candidates are disadvantaged as evidence remains incomplete. Risk remains of coursework evidence being incomplete or in a poor condition and SQA is unable to liaise with centres. Centre staff are unwilling, but may be more willing to work to a single final date, to enter buildings to source evidence and data for submission as required.

Assumptions:

- Candidates can complete the coursework by the revised date.
- Coursework evidence and estimate data will be submitted as required with no missing evidence or further extensions allowed
- Estimate data has been arrived at in the normal way
- Schools and colleges will ensure arrangements can be made for the completion of evidence and be able/prepared to access buildings in order to submit to SQA
- Courier supplier is able to accommodate revised uplift arrangements
- SQA is able to accommodate final single uplift arrangements

- If no exams are delivered, SQA has more time to mark coursework. If exams continue, a delayed uplift could have a significant impact on procedural events and timelines

Recommendation

Option 2 preferred but depends on willingness of centres to assist.