SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY

CODE OF PRACTICE GOVERNANCE GROUP – 31 MARCH 2020

NATIONAL 5 COURSEWORK – MARKING AND DISTRIBUTION

INTRODUCTION

It was agreed at the last meeting of CoPGG on 27 March that a final paper setting out the issues influencing our decision to assess the National 5 coursework should be presented to the meeting on 31 March 2020.

CoPGG has considered several papers on the marking and distribution of National 5 coursework during March.

This paper seeks to address three factors which have been the focus of our consideration – marker reliability, logistics of uplifting and distributing coursework, and a scalable model of remote standardisation to ensure standards are understood by marking teams prior to the start of marking.

STATUS

On 17 March, a paper was developed for the Chief Examining Officer and Director of Qualifications (pre CoPGG) containing a number of options and assumptions informing our decision to mark National 5 coursework.

Options included:

1. Bring forward the date for the uplift of coursework and estimates
2. Work to existing uplift arrangements
3. Agree a final date for the remainder of all outstanding coursework and estimate data (notionally end of first week in May)

Each option listed a number of assumptions, primarily concerned with:

- Incomplete nature of coursework across centres and subjects and there is 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 and centres are able to accommodate changes in uplift dates
- Estimate data will be complete 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.
- There is a viable tool to support standardisation (quality assurance) of marking across marking teams prior to the start of marking.

On March 17 2020, Option 2 was recommended:

Work to existing uplift arrangements.

Given further announcements on social distancing in accordance with health advice guidelines, two subsequent papers responding to the pace of change were considered at CoPGG on 23 and 25 March 2020.

On 23 March, the recommendation to CoPGG was:

We should delay sending scripts to markers until we have confirmed the available marking resource and negotiate a later date to send materials to markers with our courier service.

We should consider if it may be more appropriate to retain National 5 materials on site for the purposes of appeals, given the amount of outstanding evidence and the fluid pace at which the situation progressing.

On 25 March, the recommendation to CoPGG was:

Setting aside the significant logistical challenges and risks which COVID – 19 may present, we will attempt to mark whatever volume of materials we can to support decision of the alternative awarding model. If materials remain unmarked, we will retain/attempt to recover and could review or mark unmarked coursework at appeals stage.

During March, three factors have been considered in detail to help CoPGG make an informed decision about marking National 5 coursework. Consideration is given to each below.

Marker reliability

On 24 March, SQA emailed all 1600 appointees contracted to mark coursework materials for National 5 uplifted from centres on 18 March.

Of the 1600 appointees emailed, 1242 markers have responded with an overwhelming positive response of 1160 (72.5%) markers confirming their commitment to mark and only 15 withdrawals.

Outcome: As at 30 March, SQA has sufficient markers to mark the coursework materials received to date. There are no immediate concerns for any marking teams with sufficient reserves and expertise available at other levels, such as Higher and Advanced Higher, which can be invoked to support marking should the need arise.

Logistics of uplifting and distributing coursework

Following the uplift of coursework materials from centres on 18 March, SQA received approx. 119k out of an expected approx. 126k. A further 75k (out of an expected 79k to be confirmed on completion of scanning) has been delivered to our E marking supplier's scanning house to be prepared for Marked from Image (MFI).

A planned uplift of the remaining National 5 coursework (approx. 48k) was due on 23 April. This uplift, along with other uplifts for Higher and Advanced Higher, has since been cancelled following a further announcement by the Scottish Government on 22 March that

coursework should not be completed in schools in accordance with revised health advice guidelines on social distancing.

All other materials were returned to SQA and are currently in secure storage in our Script Management Facility (SMF) in Lowden. To date, we have completed the initial elements of reconciling and script turnaround in preparation for distribution to makers. We have still to complete the final stages including labelling materials with address details of appointees and agreeing a revised date for pickup by the courier service.

A key dependency for the distribution of materials is our courier service. Along with other service users, SQA was advised of changes to the courier service, including a more detailed note on 26 March, outlining a number of implications for our service level agreement with the courier. In short, the usual service around secure delivery (track and trace), storage and guaranteed timescales for delivery could not be promised in the circumstances.

SQA has initiated discussions with the courier service seeking guarantees on delivery. On 27 March, SQA received confirmation that the courier would prioritise our service but their overall recommendation in writing is that SQA is advised against despatch of these materials due to the elevated level of risk identified.

We have also been advised that all other awarding organisations in the UK have cancelled further planned distributions.

There is no viable alternative provider able to provide the secure service required for the safe distribution of examination materials.

Outcome: Setting aside that a number of materials remain outstanding from the 18 March uplift, safe and secure delivery of materials to markers cannot now be guaranteed.

A viable and scalable model for remote standardisation of marking

Standardisation is the process whereby the marking standards are agreed between the Principal Assessor and Senior Marking team. This process normally takes place at face to face meetings and is very interactive. Effective standardisation is essential to completing marking to the required quality.

In the current circumstances several alternative approaches to standardisation have been explored. It should be noted that no single appropriate alternative approach can be applied across all components. The subject type, size of marking team, whether the coursework assessment has changed over last year, and marking type all influence what is possible/practicable.

Several coursework components have tried to carry out remote standardisation using Microsoft TEAMs to share information and interact. The biggest issue has been an inability for Appointees and SQA staff to safely share the same information. Cross directorate discussion has as yet been unable to identify a viable, scalable model within the timescales required.

Given the vital role Standardisation plays in marking it should be noted that scaling this approach across components carries significant risk to effectively completing Standardisation. In normal circumstances, a piloted phased approach would be taken to introducing this. Before the current crisis the concept of remote Standardisation meetings

was discussed at some length during the Markers Meeting project and it was agreed that it was too risky to pilot even this approach for Standardisation.

Other approaches to quality assurance of marking have included increasing the number of markers checks at the end of marking for those components where there has been little change over time and also changing central marking events to home based marking (postal). Both approaches depend on reallocations to markers during the course of marking and presents additional risks in the handling and distribution of materials which rely on the courier service.

Where practicable, we have already moved to delivering markers' briefings using webinars.

It should also be noted that we are currently revising the procedural programme for marking the National 5 coursework. This would start on 27 April and would run until 2 June following our normal business rules. This would be dependent on PA and Appointee availability. It is unrealistic to imagine this could be scheduled and completed significantly earlier than this, given that changes to marking types are likely to add rather than reduce the time required to complete marking and quality assurance activity.

Outcome: There is currently no viable, scalable tool to support remote standardisation of marking prior to the start of marking. If the decision is taken to proceed with marking National 5 coursework, it must be recognised that there will be a significant risk to being able to complete it within a scheduled timescale and that the quality of marking could be compromised.

RECOMMENDATION

In light of growing concerns about the safe and secure distribution of materials and the lack of a viable tool to conduct remote standardisation of marking to scale, it is recommended that SQA **does not** proceed with marking the National 5 Coursework materials received to date.

The National 5 coursework, including scanned images and paper based materials, should be retained securely and the time should be used to explore and develop a method for remote standardisation ahead of the appeals process.

This recommendation is based on the assumption that coursework and alternative evidence will be available for the proposed appeals process as it is currently defined as at 27 March.