Scottish Qualifications Authority

Code of Practice Governance Group 1 April 2020

National 3 and National 4 contingency

1 Context

On 27 March 2020, CoPGG discussed and agreed an approach for the delivery and quality assurance of National Certificates (NCs) and National Progression Awards (NPAs) [NQGAs] that aligns with the College Principals' preferred approach for Higher National Courses (HN) (CoPPG, 2020).

SQA would like to adopt a similar approach to the delivery and quality assurance of National 3 (N3) and National 4 (N4) courses with a view to providing parity of approach across all self-regulated qualifications. This paper outlines aspects of the agreed approach which were deemed by the SLWG N3 and N4 contingency to be the main implications for N3/N4.

2 Status

SQA has a duty to ensure that the standard of its qualifications is credible with learners, their parents, schools, colleges, universities and wider stakeholders. SQA does this by adhering to its principles of assessment to ensure that its qualifications are valid, reliable, practicable and fair.

Implications of the proposed approach for N3/N4

Like other self-regulated qualifications, N3 and N4 are delivered and assessed at different points in the school year with a closing date of 22 May 2020 for submission of outstanding unit results.

Currently a large proportion of unit entries have not yet been resulted. It is unclear if the assessment has been completed and awaiting results being submitted to SQA or if assessment is still to be completed. Although many N4AVU may have been completed, we do know that some schools wait until study leave to deliver AVU assessment to N4 candidates. This means that there is an uneven playing field across Scotland in relation to the completion of N3 and N4 units, including the N4AVU.

Based on the proposed model for NQGAs the following assumptions have been made:

- That candidates who have results already in the system will be certificated as normal.
- That the term 'estimate' refers to centres predictions of whether a candidate has passed or failed, based on existing evidence and their knowledge of candidate performance.

The following implications are presented, in line with the proposed approach for NQGAs.

(1) Teachers provide predictions of pass/fail based on partial evidence and a knowledge of candidate performance.

N3 and N4 units (with the exception of the N4AVU)

Evidence requirements in N3 and N4 units, with the exception of the N4AVU, do not generally prescribe assessment methods or types of evidence in their unit specifications. To this end, there is no restriction on the type of evidence, or the conditions required, for assessment of N3 and N4 units.

However, in some cases, the N3/N4 outcomes and assessment standards may necessitate a particular evidence type, such as an artefact or item. If the type of evidence has been stated, the conditions in which

learners should produce the evidence have also been stated. In addition, in some instances, the assessment support pack will state the conditions required for unit assessment at these levels.

To reduce the volume of re-assessment, thresholds are currently in place in some N4 units. These thresholds outline if a candidate successfully meets the requirements of the specified number of assessment standards they will be judged to have passed the unit overall and no further re-assessment will be required.

If teachers have enough evidence of candidates' performance across the N3 and N4 units, for example, through the use of thresholds at N4 or broad judgement at N3, they should be able to predict candidate performance for outstanding units/outcomes. This would mean that, where there is adequate evidence available the N3 course and the N4 units could be certificated, in line with the agreed approach to NQGAs.

N4 AVU

The N4AVU differs from other National Course external assessments as it selects from across the course, it does not sample but it does assess breadth, challenge and application as the added value of the course. The N4AVU specifies the assessment method (one of the seven agreed assessment methods) and is subject to controlled assessment, which means that varying levels of control relating to the setting, marking and conducting of the assessment, including conditions of assessment are explicitly prescribed and vary across subjects. Some N4AVUs are set by SQA, but all are marked and conducted at centre level. Again, some N4AVU's require the production of an artefact or item.

Theoretically, if the N4AVU hasn't been completed, teachers are likely to be able to infer candidate performance for the whole of the course – on the basis that the majority of the 'content' will have been covered during the delivery and assessment of the units. The only implication in relation to this is that candidates achieving the whole N4 course, without undertaking the N4AVU, will not have had the added value assessed. This means that in principle, centres will be able to predict a candidate's overall performance in the N4AVU based on unit performance, which would be in line with the approach taken at N5- AH and NQGAs.

(2) Where outcomes have not been met, evidence will be scrutinised to identify whether this is adequate assessment evidence, or key assessment is devised to gather evidence.

Unit assessments cannot be conducted remotely using secure assessment, any centre-devised assessments would not be prior verified and once out in the ether no longer valid. To this end, we cannot be sure any evidence produced is the candidate's own work and there would be no control over conditions of assessment.

If an appropriate key assessment is devised, conditions on conducting the assessment would require to be lifted across the board with candidates providing authentication statements to state that the work is their own. This would allow:

- National 3 and National 4 units to be completed or plugged, where required.
- Centre set N4AVU assessments are delivered via Glow and completed, by candidates at home.
- SQA set N4AVUs could be issued through the Glow to be undertaken at home.

However, there are some implications relating to these two approaches some of which may be similar to N5 and AH.

(1) **Providing predictions of candidates' performance, based on partial evidence**

- Where staff have not uploaded their unit results (so that they could see them at home) they may not be able to access the required information in order to provide estimates. This would require them entering schools to upload to make judgments about candidates' performance, which is not possible at this time.
- Seemis cannot be accessed by teachers at home. If teacher judgement were to be used, this would put tremendous pressure on the staff member in the school entering the results – or the senior management team entering at home.

- The construct of these qualifications may not adequately be represented which is a threat to validity.
- Reassessment opportunities may be lost which is a matter of fairness.
- Concerns over the reliability of teachers estimates may mean that end users of N4 may not value this cohorts' qualification – this is particularly true for candidates using it as an exit level qualification.

(2) **Collecting additional evidence**

- Groupwork based activities, particularly those preceding an assignment write-up, may not have been undertaken, so candidates may not be able to complete the assignment.
- Artefacts or products may not be started and candidates are unlikely to be able to complete these either through lack of access to their work or through lack of resources.
- Candidates, may not be able to access their school work at home more generally or more specifically particular resources or software, particularly in the technical/practical subjects. This may link to socio-economic and inclusion issues.
- Evidence produced is likely to be compromised as candidates may collaborate within and across centres – leading to wide areas of malpractice.
- As with providing estimates, teachers may not have the ability to upload assessments, mark them and then upload the results in order to certificate.
- Results may be delayed whist gathering evidence. This may cause problems for colleges who need the results for entry.
- Candidates are not being asked to provide additional evidence for N5 – AH so it may be viewed that N4 candidates are being penalised.

3 Recommendation

Based on the implications noted above, the SLWG does not think it is feasible for teachers to carry out outstanding assessments in order to complete the course or unit (if doing free-standing units). This is particularly true as N5 – AH does not have a requirement to generate evidence for missing coursework components to allow for certification.

The group recommends:

(1) That centres should provide unit results based on existing evidence and their knowledge of a candidate's performance, across the year, in line with approach taken at National 5 – Advanced Higher. This recommendation is based on concerns that we do not know at what point in time teaching staff will be able to enter unit passes or conduct outstanding unit assessments. Also, the majority of colleagues consulted have expressed concerns about the security of assessments (being completed remotely), conditions of assessment not being applied and lack of parity between those having already achieved unit passes and those who would undertake them online.

(2) That guidance produced by SQA clearly outlines what an acceptable 'pass' looks like at N3 and N4, in line with the assessment standards and teachers' knowledge of a candidate's performance. In addition, guidance will also need to state that centres must be able to justify and retain evidence of their decision-making process, so that the decision-making process, rather than the outcome can be verified at any future verification events.

This means that the approved approach for NQGA may not be able to be taken in its entirety, with N3 and N4 lending itself predominantly to the approach used at N5 – AH.

.