Guidance for centres about estimates

1 Introduction

SQA is still working on the alternate approach to determining grades for National Courses, in the absence of performance data. One of the key pieces of data that SQA will use in any model will be centres estimates. Centres would like more information from SQA about estimates and the timelines for submission of the information prior to the Easter holidays.

2 Background and context

In addition Ofqual will put out information about this tomorrow to English centres and so it would seem appropriate for SQA to also do this too for Scottish centres. The Ofqual communication to heads of centres is as follows

'Centre assessment grades

Exam boards will contact you after Easter to ask you to submit, no earlier than 29 May 2020, the following:

- a centre assessment grade for every one of your students, in each of their subjects. This should represent the grade you believe they were most likely to have achieved if they had sat their exams. When reaching your judgements, you should balance different sources of evidence such as classwork, bookwork and participation in any performances in subjects like music, drama or PE; any non-exam assessment – whether or not complete; the results of any assignments or mock exams; previous results – for example, for any re-sitting students or those with relevant AS qualifications; and any other records of student performance over the course of study
- the rank order of students within each grade – for example, for all those students with a grade of 5 in GCSE maths, a rank order where 1 is the most secure/highest attaining student, and so on
- a declaration from you, as Head of Centre, or the deputy making the submission on your behalf'

Rank Order

Other types of data we can ask centres for include a rank order of their pupils for each course by grade, adopting a similar approach to that of Ofqual.. In asking for this data we are asking teachers to be able to estimate the rank order of pupils relative to each other. SQA and SEB used to ask for this information from teachers but it has not been a requirement since……. This is a useful additional piece of information as e.g. a teacher may be overly optimistic in estimating absolute grades but they may be able to judge accurately which pupils will perform better than others – a relative judgement. This type of information is useful at a centre level if any moderation of centre estimates is to be carried out as it allows an awarding body to adjust grade distributions whilts maintain the overall rank that the centres has supplied. Culturally we need to recognise that if SQA was to ask additionally for this information that teachers may struggle to supply this but it does give another level of assurance about the awarding of grades in the absence of performance data by maintaining the rank order specified by centres.

2 Current approach in Scotland

SQA currently requires all centres presenting candidates for graded National Courses to submit an estimate of expected candidate performance on a 9 point scale

Band 1 85-100%

Band 2 70-84%

Band 3 65-69%

Band 4 60-64%

Band 5 55-59%

Band 6 50-54%

Band 7 40-49%

Band 8 30-39%

Band 9 less than 30%

SQA has existing published guidance for centres and we also do a lot of work around understanding standards with our centres to illustrate expectations at Grade A and C level. We have historic data about the relationship between centre estimates by centre for each course and at each level. In our normal awarding processes, we use this information as a general measure of the cohort this year in comparison to previous years and it is also used in the exceptional circumstances process.

3 Options

The options are:

1. Current Estimate Scale only
2. Extended Estimate Scale only
3. Extended Estimate Scale and Ranking

Working Assumption: we will attempt to maintain as close to a long term attainment and grade distribution – across and within subjects at a level - as possible

Option 1 – use the current estimate scale

The pros and cons of using the current Estimate Scale (1-9) are set out below:

Pros

- Centres are familiar with this scale and other SQA support focused on this.
- Existing systems in place to receive this information from centres
- Historical information available to consider past national and centre relationships
- SQA systems result on this scale
- No change to estimating practice required.

Cons

- Lack of granularity makes nuanced awarding decisions challenging (significant issue)
- Assumed existing approaches are held unchanged for Diet 2020
- Lack of SQA understanding of cross centre approaches to estimating

Using the existing estimate scale is being discounted as it lacks the granularity for SQA to make nuanced awarding decisions.

Option 2 use an extended estimate scale

In order to allow comparisons across years an extended grade scale must map to the current 1-9 scale.

Extending the estimate scale would give increased granularity for awarding decisions, which is a key advantage in maintain comparability of grade distributions over time.

A proposes extension to the estimate scale if given in the attached excel spreadsheet. This proposes subdividing grades B, C, D, and band 8 into 4 sub-divisions. This should give SQA sufficient granularity to make awarding decisions, in the absence of performance data. In addition it should give SQA a reasonable 'rank order from centres, assuming they use the complete range of the scale.

The pros and cons of this approach are outlined below.

Pros

- Centres familiar with existing scale upon which this scale is based
- Can be mapped to existing scale for certification and historical estimates
- Builds on current estimating practice and intuitive 'cultural' approach
- Support more granular/nuanced awarding decisions
- As close to actual marks as we may get

Cons

- Need business systems support to allow centres to submit this information
- Centres may not use the full range of extra bands – this could potentially be mitigated by guidance
- May still not provide the level of granularity we need
- Balanced required between equal band sizes and salami slicing

Option 3 use an extended estimate scale and rank order

In essence this would facilitate enhanced national adjustments to grade boundaries to match previous years national distributions (extended estimate scale) and the rank order would facilitate centre moderation of estimates by preserving the rank order given by centres????

Pros

- Requires 2 sets of information from centres, which can be used by SQA to make the best judgements that we can in the absence of performance data
- Practitioners held to find ranking accuracy more straightforward than absolute accuracy
- Would align SQA's approach to that of Ofqual in England

Cons

- Lack of cross centre comparability, e.g. candidates ranked 10th in a subject in different centres are unlikely to be of equal ability
- Not able to award based on rankings alone and needs to be included alongside some form of band estimates

- Need business systems support to allow centres to submit this information
- May be challenging to do this within the 'culture' of CfE and the range of different assessment approaches in current National Courses

4 Recommendation

It is recommended that SQA uses option 2 with the extended estimate scale only. This should give SQA enough granularity to make awarding decisions, in the absence of performance data. In addition, it should give SQA a reasonable 'rank order from centres, assuming they use the complete range of the scale.

Assumptions

- Centres use the full range of the estimate scale
- Centres have access to sufficient information in order to make good accurate estimates for their candidates
- Estimates are made with principle of fairness, equity in mind.
- Estimating practice this year is in line with previous years
- Centres have in place a robust mechanism to quality assure their estimates
- Assuming we would ask for a HT declaration in line with OFqual practice.

Risk

There is a risk in making this decision ahead of the model for determining candidate grades in National Courses ahead of agreeing the model for awarding, in the absence of performance data.