Scottish Qualifications Authority

Code of Practice Governance Group

14 April 2020

Diet 2020 Awarding and Centre-level Moderation

1 Context

SQA continues to consider a range of options around determining the entitlement of graded National Courses in Diet 2020 as a result of the impact of the COVD-19 public health emergency.

2 Status

Appendix One builds on the paper '*Determining Entitlement of Graded National Courses in Diet 2020'* discussed by the Code of Practice Governance Group on 07 April 2020.

It outlines the interplay between Centre-level Moderation and Awarding. The main discussion points are around the former and whether there is an appetite to change Centre Estimates using statistical techniques without engagement with Centres and the sufficiency of entries within and across Centres to inform this.

Additionally, should it be decided to engage with Centres directly during Centre-level Moderation then who and how will this take place including the potential for this to elongate the process, are points for further consideration.

3 Recommendation

The Code of Practice Governance Group is invited to consider the issues raised in this paper.

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Appendix One

Overview

An alternative awarding approach is being implemented to allow SQA to result graded National Courses in Diet 2020 with reliability, equity and fairness – over time, across subjects and levels – in the absence of any candidate performance assessment information.

Estimates will be the only source of candidate performance information in Diet 2020. There will be no mechanism for SQA to ascertain the provenance of these Estimates prior to resulting or the internal Centre assessments which inform them. As a result, the reliability of Estimates needs to be informed by clear guidance.

This paper acts as a specification to develop and implement the alternative awarding approach based on the following agreed principles[1]:

- Existing bands will be sub-divided;
- Centre estimates will be based on these bands with candidate rankings required within these bands;
- SQA will adjust estimates – where necessary – to ensure consistency across centres and, in comparison with previous years;
- The above process may be informed by previous subject and qualification performance at both national and centre-level;
- Prior attainment may be used – where this available;
- A free post-results service to ensure that schools and colleges continue to have a mechanism to question any result will be available.

Inputs: Estimates based on a more granular scale and candidate rankings within each band; both provided by centres.

Outputs: Grade-only resulting – Band 2, Band 4, Band 6, Band 7, Band 8, Band 9.

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[1] SQA update on arrangements for quality assurance and the certification of National Courses and Awards – a message to schools and colleges (Thursday 02 April 2020)

Awarding Assumptions

In Diet 2020, awarding decisions will be based on an extended estimate scale which must be linked to the current nine-point band scale to allow subsequent resulting. However, centres will also still use the existing nine-point scale. The extended scale will allow a more nuanced approach to awarding decisions. The actual scale is to be agreed.

Based on the above, the assumption remains that if a candidate in Centre X is estimated at a Band and a candidate in Centre Y is also estimated at the same Band then they will both receive the same Grade on 04 August 2020. The only reason this would not hold is if SQA identified issues of over or under-estimating during Centre Moderation and decided to change a centre's Estimates.

However, there is no guarantee that learners will obtain the Grade expected by their centre. They may obtain a higher or lower Grade as a result of the final step in the SQA Awarding process.

Centre-level Moderation Assumptions

Centre level moderation of Estimates will consider a combination of two factors – *Consistency of Estimating* and *Outcomes-based.*

Consistency of Estimating	This involves a consideration of how a centre has been historically estimating candidate performance in a qualification over the past three years and whether the Estimates submitted for Diet 2020 are in line with this. This is a measure of centre estimation consistency.
Outcomes-Based	This involves a consideration of centre attainment (including grade distributions) in a subject/level over the past three years, as well as the relationship between Estimates and outcomes. This is largely a measure of historical cohort ability.

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Centre-level Moderation - I

The first step in Centre-level Moderation is making centres aware of their historical estimates v actual attainment to inform their estimating practice for Diet 2020. *Centre Performance Tables* are being prepared for all centres offering graded National Courses. These will address two questions based on historical information SQA holds on each centre over the past three years:

- What volume of attainment did centres believe they would obtain (Estimates)?
- What volume of attainment did centres obtain (August certification)?

This will be at individual record-level within a subject/level.

Additionally, the Insight Tariff Scale can be used to model overall centre Estimate 'claims' and attainment over time in SQA.

These tables will be supplied to centres in early May 2020. Their purpose is to help centres reflect on their previous use of Estimates. Some centres / local authorities have already requested information on historical Estimates v actual attainment. Providing this information to centres is likely to remove the efficacy of our *Consistency of Estimating* measure. However, it does provide an opportunity to inform estimating practice this year through clear guidance to Centres on the approach they should take.

Awarding - I

Centre estimates will be submitted by 29 May 2020. The first step in the Awarding process now takes place. Our current 'Direct Panel Awarding' contingency will be required for Diet 2020. Essentially, this suspends our business-as-usual Awarding approach and allows flexibility in the personnel and supporting information involved. Personnel and information involved in this process are still to be agreed. Although, it is envisaged that prior attainment will be used where available as an indication of cohort strength in line with business-as-usual Awarding approaches.

We will apply our agreed target A-D national distribution for each subject/level to the Estimates provided by centres. The Centre Performance Tables will then be updated with this information.

In summary, this step will decide which of the extended band scale Estimates will contribute to the attainment of Grades A – D and will hold the rule that all learners with the same estimated Band in this final step of Awarding will receive the same Grade.

This will allow the following questions to be addressed:

- What volume of attainment do centres believe they should obtain this year (Estimates)?
- What volume of attainment will centres obtain this year (national distributions)?
- How does this differ from previous years?

Statistical options are being considered to address the third question. However, this is limited by the fact that our dataset includes low-uptake qualifications; and new, returning or very low-uptake centres. For example, in Diet 2019 national level entry figures varied across National 5 from 74 (Urdu) to 45,593 (English), across Higher from 61 (Gaelic) to 35,461 (English), and across Advanced Higher from 9 (Music Portfolio) to 3,706 (Mathematics). Advanced Higher has very low national entry numbers in some subject areas.

Additionally, even in large uptake subjects there can be significant variation. In Diet 2019, the largest number of entries at centre level for National 5 was for Mathematics, but entry levels ranged across centres from 1 to 319 (average 98). For Higher, the largest number of entries at centre level was for English, ranging across centres from 1 to 314 (average 87). For Advanced Higher, the largest number of entries at centre level was for Mathematics, with a range across centres from 1 to 61 (average 12).

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Additionally, any statistical options deployed can only provide an indication of possible under or over-estimation. Genuine changes in performance due to different cohorts is a reasonable possibility and year to year centre variability is not unreasonable particularly when entry numbers are low/moderate.

However, the more 'generous' the target A-D national distributions are then, all things remaining equal, the less centre issues are likely to be identified at Centre-level Moderation and post-certification Appeals. Additionally, it is possible however that centres will remain that have both 'generous' and 'severe' estimations, so a desirable or even generous national distribution is not guaranteed to reduce centre issues arising from estimation accuracy.

Centre-level Moderation - II

The second step in Centre-level Moderation will investigate any anomalies identified and agree and will require liaison with centres. This is outwith the scope and resources of the statistical function but guidance to support this liaison could be developed to ensure all centres, subjects and levels are considered consistently. Issues could simply be the result of incorrect Estimates being submitted. However, this could potentially be a contested and lengthy process, particularly where we have over-estimation concerns.

Nonetheless, there is a need to record carefully any changes SQA may make to Centre Estimates and the rationale behind each decision.

Awarding - II

Awarding decisions will be signed-off for each subject and level.

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