Scottish Qualifications Authority

Code of Practice Governance Group

29 May 2020

Awarding decisions during the Alternative Certification Model

1 Context

For this session, estimates will be the main basis for awards in the absence of any evidence generated by candidates through coursework or examinations.

To assist SQA in the awarding and certification process for 2020, we requested centres to place their learners within refined bands and provide rank orders within those refined bands. SQA will undertake layers of statistical validation to identify centres whose estimates that are outwith various tolerances and require adjustment. The estimates, adjusted as necessary, will be presented at an awarding meeting for each national course. The purpose of the awarding meeting is to ensure fairness to learners and to maintain national standards.

There has been some debate about the use of bands, refined bands and grades for awarding 2020 – this paper aims to conclude and arrive at a definitive position. SAS has recently confirmed that adjusted estimates can be provided in refined bands. There is a risk of negative reaction if, having asked centres to submit refined bands, we only provide grades and a limited number of bands.

This paper summarises how the refined estimates information could be used in awarding.

2 Status

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Estimate Bands
The table below summarises the refined bands in use for this session.

Grade	Band	Refined Band		Notional % Range
A	1	1Upper	1	93 – 100
A	1	1Lower	2	85 - 92
A	2	2Upper	3	80 - 84
A	2	2Middle	4	75 - 79
A	2	2Lower	5	70 - 74
B	3	3Upper	6	67 – 69
B	3	3Lower	7	65 – 66
B	4	4Upper	8	62 – 64
B	4	4Lower	9	60 - 61
C	5	5Upper	10	57 - 59
C	5	5Lower	11	55 - 56
C	6	6Upper	12	52 – 54

C	6	6Lower	13	50 – 51
D	7	7Upper	14	47 – 49
D	7	7Middle	15	44 - 46
D	7	7Lower	16	40 - 43
No Award	8	8Upper	17	35 - 39
No Award	8	8Lower	18	30 – 34
No Award	9	9	19	0 – 29

During a normal year, grade boundary meetings are held drawing on all available data from the assessment components, various PA reports and details about estimates, cohort make up, previous year's attainment etc, to make decisions about the grade boundaries for grades A, C and band 1. All other grades and bands are calculated automatically.

This year we will have cohort and historical data, and centre refined band estimates – both pre- and post- centre moderation. Having data at this level of granularity means that it will be possible to award grades and report bands.

It will be possible to decide which refined band should be the threshold for grades A and C. Having done this, three refined bands could be used for grade D and for A band 2. A check could then be made about how this distribution compares with historic results, and in particular the number of A band 1 awards.

Grade B is usually halfway between A and C, where there are an even number of refined bands between the A and C thresholds, this should be straightforward, where it isn't we may need to split candidates within a refined band, using the rank orders. It may be worth a check of the threshold for grade B. The same applies with the bands 3 and 5.

Assumptions and points for consideration

SQA is committed to fairness to learners and maintaining national standards, this year's awarding meetings are critical in this ambition. Using the refined band estimates should allow the award of grades and reporting of bands.

- Should thresholds for grades A and C be used?
- Should three refined bands be used for grade D and A band 2, with a check on the proportion of A band 1?
- Should grade B, be an equal split of the refined bands between the C and A thresholds? Does this need to be checked to ensure proportions bear some resemblance to proportions in previous years?
- Should grades B and C be equally split to give bands 3 to 6? Does this need to be checked to ensure proportions bear some resemblance to proportions in previous years?

3 Recommendation

The CoPGG is asked to agree that SQA awards grades to candidates and reports bands to centres and UCAS, with awarding decisions based on thresholds for Grades A and C,