Paper for COPGG 28 May 2020

Options for quality assurance of NQ unit resulting under COVID-19 contingency 2020

At the meeting of COPGG on 23 March 2020, the decision was taken by SQA to postpone all remaining planned external verification in session 2019-20. Approximately one third of external verification activity for 2019-20 had been completed by that point.

The statement on quality assurance and certification for National 2, National 3, National 4 courses, Scottish Baccalaureate Interdisciplinary Project unit and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6, and 7 released to schools and colleges on 2 April 2020 included the following: "All assessment evidence and the justification of decision-making should be retained until December 2020, so that the decision-making process can be verified by SQA in the future. This arrangement helps us to support the safe and secure certification of our qualifications, whilst recognising the current challenges we all face".

A decision is now required on what quality assurance activity – if any – will be carried out on units resulted in 2020.

The QA(NQ) Senior Team has considered a range of options on how unit resulting decisions made by centres in 2020 might be externally quality assured. The table in the appendix to this paper outlines the options and related pros and cons identified

It was decided to focus our efforts initially on working with colleagues in Qualifications Development to provide more up-front guidance on how unit resulting should be undertaken and recorded, partly in response to the number of queries from centres. Options 3, 4 and 5 would have very limited value if centres were not clear on what was expected in advance of the resulting process. FAQs to bolster the statement issued on 2 April have been developed and were published on the website on 21 May.

Option 5 would be a similar approach as we have taken to Post-Certification Quality Assurance (PCQA) in the last two years. However, we would not be able to expect that complete candidate evidence would be available to support unit results this session, given the situation.

In addition to standard internal verification procedures in all centres, it has been agreed with colleges that Internal Quality Assurance panels will review decision-making on resulting in 2020, and that input and advice can be requested from SQA on these panels. Any additional external QA processes on unit resulting would, therefore, seem unnecessary for colleges.

Following assessment of the pros and cons of each option, we recommend Option 1 - do no further quality assurance of NQ unit resulting in 2020 and move to external verification of the new intake of candidates in session 2020/21. We further recommend that Option 1 is strengthened by undertaking Option 2 early in the next academic session to inform any future guidance that may be required to support centres in session 2020/21.

On balance, these are our preferred option because Option 3 has been overtaken by the production of additional guidance on resulting and the retrospective checks outlined in Options 4 and 5 would be of very limited value to SQA because we know that only partial assessment evidence will be available. Any value from these activities would be outweighed by the disruption and extra work for centres, at a time when they are working to deliver education in the new session, with on-going social distancing, blended learning approaches and limitations on staff and learners being physically

in attendance at any time. Centres will also be involved in post-certification reviews for National Courses during the same time period.

Furthermore, we feel that there is merit in a fact-finding exercise about the process of resulting internally assessed units and courses in 2020, as outlined in Option 2, as this information would be useful in informing any future guidance that may be required next session and so would help us in supporting centres. However, this would not be a quality assurance function. We suggest a collaborative process across relevant teams to undertake a survey of centres.

Moving forward, the NQ Verification Team will continue to monitor unit entries/passes/withdrawals in comparison to previous years (as BAU).

The requirement to retain evidence and records for potential future QA encourages centres to follow a robust process for determining unit results. Therefore, if we decide not to carry out any QA on 2020 resulting, we should not inform centres of this until after the 12 June deadline for results, and also not require them to retain candidate evidence for an unnecessarily long period of time.

Appendix – Options for QA of units resulting 2020, with pros and cons identified

Option	Pros	Cons
1 Do no further quality assurance of NQ unit resulting 2020 - move to external verification of new intake of candidates in session 2020/21	• Reduces burden and stress on centres both this session and in the new session, with ongoing social distancing and mixed physical and online delivery • Demonstrating trust in centres' internal quality assurance processes • Recognises the professional judgement of teachers and lecturers under the contingency approach this year • SQA can dedicate all QA staff and appointee resources to educational recovery and future contingency planning	• Does not reflect the 2 April statement about retaining evidence and records from 2019/20 for future verification • SQA providing less public reassurance about validity of results in internally assessed units and courses in 2020, in comparison to previous year • SCQF Levels 5-7 units have highest levels of Not Accepted outcomes, which would not be addressed
2 Investigate how the centres found the process of resulting internally assessed units and courses in 2020, and how they internally quality assured decisions e.g. through virtual visits, surveys	• Would inform any future guidance which may be required in 2020-21 if there is continued disruption to learning and assessment • Would demonstrate SQA's commitment to supporting centres in their internal quality assurance • There would be no sanctions placed on centres as a result of these activities	• Internal SQA resource will be required to carry out these activities and some time will be required from centre staff to respond • There may be limited value to this if we do not require to move away from usual practice next session
3 Pre-certification: Ask centres to provide us with assessment records of their process for determining unit results. We have done this with centres which had an outstanding Hold on certification, which is being lifted. We could extend this into other high risk areas – e.g. centres/subjects where there	• Would require centres to have a clear, recorded justification for the decisions that they have made on unit resulting • Would encourage internal verification and professional dialogue • Would help to ensure that centres have recorded justifications in place to support them in addressing	• Puts a significant additional burden on centres to provide this information to SQA and potentially cause delays in resulting • This could cause backlash from centres, due to short timescales • Centres may have started on the process of determining unit results before detailed guidance was issued

are high numbers of late unit entries.	any internal assessment appeals • Would provide SQA with information if we had to take this approach again in future	• If we were not satisfied with the approach we would face decisions about whether to put Holds on certification • Appointees would require training on our expectations, as this is not a standard QA process
4 Post-certification: Ask centres to provide us with assessment records of their process for determining unit results. This could be restricted to high risk areas e.g. centres and subjects with high numbers of late unit entries	• Would demonstrate SQA's commitment to quality assurance and public accountability • Would require centres to have a clear, recorded justifications for the decisions that they have made on unit resulting • Would provide SQA with information if we had to take this approach again in future	• Timescales would put a significant additional burden on centres at the start of the new session, with ongoing social distancing and mixed physical and online delivery • Timescales would coincide with post-certification reviews for National Courses • This could cause backlash from centres • This would be a retrospective exercise with limited value • If we were not satisfied with the approach taken by centres we would face decisions about whether to revoke certifications or pursue malpractice investigations, or take no action (other than share with the centre) • Appointees would require training on our expectations, as this is not a standard QA process
5 Post-certification: Carry out some quality assurance of candidate evidence, as well as assessment records, to support unit results Could be restricted to high risk areas e.g. centres and subjects with very high level of late unit entries	• Would demonstrate SQA's commitment to quality assurance and public accountability • Would require centres to have a clear justification for the decisions that they have made on unit resulting	• Timescales would put a significant additional burden on centres at the start of the new session, with ongoing social distancing and mixed physical and online delivery • Timescales would coincide with post-certification reviews for National Courses

		• There is very likely to be no or very limited evidence for many units, due to the timing of the lockdown • Teaching staff have been allowed to use their professional judgement and their knowledge of the learner and previous attainment – can explain this, but not provide any actual candidate evidence for the unit to be verified • If we had concerns, we would either have to take no action, or consider revoking certificates or pursuing malpractice investigations • Appointees would require training on our expectations, as this is not a standard QA process