Foundation Apprenticeships **26th May 2020**

Background

Foundation Apprenticeships (FAs) are part of the SDS apprenticeship family and, according to SDS figures, have approximately 1700 senior phase pupils expecting to finish their course this summer. SQA currently has significantly less candidates registered on our systems; however, this is not uncommon, and we would expect to see in an increase in entries over the next few weeks.

There are currently 12 frameworks which cover a wide range of sectors including, care, engineering and financial services (appendix 1). Whilst most of the frameworks are made up of SQA qualifications and units, some also contain other awarding organisation's such as REHIS and EAL. In the main, each framework is made up of either a National Progression Award (NPA) or National Certificate (NC) and several VQ regulated work-based units. Each framework is at SCQF Level 6 and is awarded by SQA, SDS and the various sector bodies.

The most common delivery model for FAs are in partnership with schools, colleges and employers, however some contracts have been awarded to local authorities and are being delivered in partnership with training providers and employers.

COVID-19

SQA have been meeting with [redacted] and [redacted] from SDS on a weekly basis since 26th March 2020. We have discussed, at length, a number of potential options to ensure that learners are recognised for their work, allowing them to progress on their pathways, whilst ensuring we remain compliant with the regulator and any potential adaptations to assessment strategies are agreed with the various sector bodies across the frameworks. Please see appendix 2 for a timeline of events.

Given the complexity of the frameworks, in that they include multiple provision, some which we own and self-regulated, some regulated, other AO provision and all with sector body input, it has taken 6 weeks to liaise with all the agencies involved to reach an agreed solution to recognising achievement.

There have been several obstacles which have had to be overcome in order to progress. These, in brief, are: -

- Solutions had to be found in line with our sector wide response to COVID-19 for the various qualification types.
- There was a lack of understanding from SDS and with many FA providers, that the inclusion of regulated units has implications on what can, or indeed, cannot, be adapted and therefore certificated.
- FAs have been positioned as a SCQF level 6 qualification which has parity with Highers, and many HE institutions have recognised them as such. SQA must treat them as regulated qualifications.
- A lack of understanding as to why we cannot simply apply the same COVID-19 approach to FAs as we have done for other self-regulated qualifications.

SDS gathered a significant volume of data from FA providers over the last few weeks which indicated that most candidates had not completed all the VQ units within their FA and that most were unable to continue for various reasons. On this basis, we arrived at the solution now being tabled with Colleges Scotland/College Principals and Universities Scotland.

Approach

The agreed approach between SQA and SDS has at its core, equity and fairness for all learners. We have worked together to protect the Foundation Apprenticeship brand, whilst ensuring that we don't compromise the integrity of certification and maintain regulatory compliance.

Initially, SDS had submitted a proposal, which meant that we would, within agreed parameters, provide a COVID 19 FA certificate. This would be a variation of the normal commemorative certificate but recognise that completion was not possible due to the current crisis. This was taken to Product and Services Group (PSG), where SQA Directors rejected this on the basis that it didn't meet our core aims during this time.

After further discussions, the current solution has been agreed, which provides learners, again within agreed parameters, a letter of recognition. Key to the success of this solution is agreement from both HE and FE that they will recognise the letter in place of a full FA certificate in this year's unprecedented circumstances. The letter would be jointly badged between SQA and SDS and SDS would provide this to the agreed learners on 4th August. The detail of this is below: -

- The NC/NPA elements of the frameworks would be resulted in accordance to the guidance provided to all centres, where a holistic approach could be used to determine grades if required.
- Any VQ unit which has been completed and achieved in full should be resulted accordingly on SQA systems.
- Any candidate who has achieved the NC/NPA element of the framework and has no VQ units recorded as 'failed', will receive a letter of recognition which outlines that they had been working towards the FA in 2020.
- Any candidate who has failed any part of the framework, or if they haven't completed the NC/NPA, will not receive a letter of recognition.
- All candidates will receive recognition for the SQA units/Group Awards that they have achieved, as normal, on 4th August, within their SQA cumulative certificate.

Over the last several weeks, SDS have been updating a small number of college principals on the proposals and timelines for announcements. This group has included [redacted], [redacted] Ayrshire College and Chair of the College Principals Group. They were advised w/b 11th May that a solution had been reached and it was suggested that two senior college staff, and a representative from Colleges Scotland, meet with SQA and SDS to discuss the proposal.

This meeting took place on 20th May and had the following attendees: -

Denise Monteith, Head of Operations HN/VQ, SQA
[redacted], SDS
[redacted], SDS
[redacted], Colleges Scotland
[redacted], Forth Valley College
[redacted], Ayrshire College

The meeting was very positive with all college representatives agreeing that the proposed solution was the best, given the circumstances. It was agreed that a brief paper outlining the proposal would be provided to Colleges Scotland by SDS and it would be tabled at a forthcoming College Principals Group meeting for agreement with regards to college admissions for next session.

A meeting is being scheduled with Universities Scotland to gain formal approval in the next week, however, SDS have already informally tabled this with member of US in the last few weeks.

Additional Information

- Decisions on approach were staggered over the last two months given that any decision taken had to be in line with our decisions and guidance for those qualifications across all markets.
- There has been growing concern, particularly from the college sector on a way forward for FAs – this has been led by Forth Valley who have the biggest number of learners on FAs.
- Our work with colleges has been a very positive experience for all involved and we have worked collaboratively to provide the best solutions we can find for the learner.
- When our decisions have not landed well, we have moved quickly to review and revise, where possible, to support colleges to the best of our ability, whilst maintaining standards and integrity of certification.
- City of Glasgow college provided a paper on HN Social Services, via the college principals group (provided by [redacted]), this was a request for flexibility in this sector to support candidates and the current crisis in health and social care. Every element of this paper was agreed by SQA and the SSSC.
- [redacted], is the City of Glasgow rep on the College Quality focus group. She is a valued contributor and has worked very closely with us in the last few months.
- We have had no negative feedback on our communication of last Friday (22/5/20) (appendix 3).
- Social media has been silent on our communication of last Friday.

Appendix 1

Current FA Frameworks

Foundation Apprenticeship in Accountancy

Foundation Apprenticeship in Business Skills

Foundation Apprenticeship in Civil Engineering

Foundation Apprenticeship in Creative and Digital Media

Foundation Apprenticeship in Engineering

Foundation Apprenticeship in Financial Services

Foundation Apprenticeship in Food and Drink Technologies

Foundation Apprenticeship in Information Technology: Hardware/ System Support

Foundation Apprenticeship in Information Technology: Software Development

Foundation Apprenticeship in Scientific Technologies

Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services and Healthcare

Foundation Apprenticeship in Social Services: Children and Young People

Appendix 2

FA Apprenticeships – COVID-19 Timeline

24/03/20 – Qualification Managers began contacting sector bodies, including those in the areas of Foundation Apprenticeships to ascertain whether there is any possibility of adaptations to the assessment strategy – this work continues for a number of weeks as sector bodies are difficult to reach (some closed altogether) and many wanting to reach out to industry before they advise.

26/03/20 – First meeting of the SDS/SQA FA Contingency Planning Group – this continues to meet weekly. (13 meetings in total since lockdown)

26/03/20 – First lockdown meeting of the college quality focus group to discuss all qualifications delivered in the college sector, including FAs – this continues to meet weekly (11 meetings in total since lockdown)

03/04/20 – Guidance issued to centres on several qualifications, including NC and NPA, elements of the FA framework. Exceptions for the care and engineering qualifications which required further with sector bodies.

07/04/20 – SDS presented a paper to SQA on potential solutions to FA certification, this included, the option to stop until it's safe to continue and also the option to certificate on the basis of a COVID-19 commemorative certificate. It also supplied data on uptake. This took several weeks to discuss and agree what could stay and what should be removed.

15/04/20 – We provided SQA accreditation with the initial findings of our discussions with sector bodies, including those for FAs. QMs continue to work with sector bodies for responses across all sectors.

C. 15/04/20 – SDS begin to provide regular updates to Scottish Government and to Jamie Hepburn.

w/b 20/04/20 – SDS ([redacted]) met with SQA Accreditation to look at any possible options for certificating learners for VQ units where they hadn't been completed. The regulator advised this would not be possible.

c. w/b 20/04/20 – SDS engage with the College Principals Group, Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland. Meetings continue with the Principals Group (subgroup) and Colleges Scotland.

30/04/20 – SDS provided SQA with a proposal paper to be tabled at PSG for a solution – this included producing a 'COVID-19 Certificate'.

05/05/20 – SDS paper presented to PSG and rejected on the grounds that it did not meet our core aims, specifically producing a 'COVID-19 Certificate'.

07/05/20 – SQA issued a formal response, rejecting the SDS paper.

11/05/20 – SDS present a response and arrange a meeting to discuss.

12/05/20 – Meeting with – SDS; [redacted] – SQA; Gill, Liz, Denise. It was agreed by all at this meeting that the letter of recognition was the best way forward and that we should secure approval from Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland.

w/b 12/05/20 – Papers written by SDS and SQA to outline approach for internal use.

15/05/20 – Ministerial update (Jamie Hepburn) provided by SDS which advised of new agreed approach.

20/05/20 – SDS/SQA/Colleges Scotland/Colleges meeting to table proposal – positively received.

22/05/20 – In response to increasing pressure from schools, colleges and training providers, SQA and SDS issue a joint statement to advise of the current position, including hoping to seek approval from College Principals Group and Universities Scotland

Appendix 3

SDS/SQA Joint Communication – 22/05/20

SQA and Skills Development Scotland (SDS) are committed to supporting learners who are undertaking a Foundation Apprenticeship, at this exceptionally difficult time. We want to ensure that young people across Scotland get the results they deserve, so they can progress to further learning or work.

The unique benefits of Foundation Apprenticeships – the blend of classroom and work-based learning – have presented unique challenges for learning providers and for learners due to complete in June this year. Covid-19 restrictions to work-placements have impacted learners' ability to complete elements of the SVQ units within each Foundation Apprenticeship Framework. Restrictions have also impacted learning providers' capacity to complete assessments and in line with regulatory requirements.

SQA and SDS have worked together with learning providers on a solution that's fair; in line with public health guidance and that maintains the integrity and credibility of Foundation Apprenticeships.

Foundation Apprenticeship learners

Learners who have completed all group awards and units of their Foundation Apprenticeship and have been resulted on SQA systems will, as normal, receive the Foundation Apprenticeship certification along with the Scottish Qualification Certificate that records all their achievement

.

Where achievement of the full Foundation Apprenticeship was not possible due to the impact of the coronavirus, we will issue learners a letter of recognition. These learners will also receive a Scottish Qualification Certificate listing their achievements. The letter will formally recognise the achievements of learners who have completed the National Certificate Award or National Progression Award part of their Foundation Apprenticeship and have no unit 'Fails' resulted on SQA systems.

All other learners who have completed and passed other units of their Foundation Apprenticeship will be certified via existing SQA processes but will not receive the letter of recognition. SDS and SQA are working with colleges and universities to discuss their acceptance of the letter of recognition for course admissions and progression to Further Education and Higher Education in 2020.

Learning providers

In order to enable this and to support learners, learning providers should continue to gather evidence where possible and have results on SQA system before **15 July 2020**. Please refer to SQA coronavirus updates for any additional subject specific guidance. Further updates will be provided when the discussions with colleges and universities on their recognition for course admissions and progression in 2020 have concluded. If you have any questions on this update, please contact newapprenticeships@sds.co.uk.