

**SQA update on arrangements for quality assurance and the certification of National Courses and Awards – a message to schools and colleges**

**2 April 2020**

**Introduction**

Today, I am providing an update in three key areas. Firstly, what evidence-based judgements we need teachers and lecturers to make about their learners’ grades to help inform certification at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Secondly, the marking of National 5 coursework. Finally, details on our approach to the certification of National 2, National 3 and National 4 courses, National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses, Awards, and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7.

**Estimating grades for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses**

We know that schools and colleges have a strong understanding of learners’ performance in National Courses. They also know how each learner compares to other learners within each department or faculty this year, and in previous years.

Given the unique position that we all find ourselves in, and our common goal to ensure that learners’ hard work is rightly and fairly recognised, we need schools and colleges’ help to continue to provide us with estimated grades and bands for all their learners entered for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

For this session, teachers and lecturers should continue to exercise their professional judgement and estimate a learner’s grade and band based on their demonstrated and inferred attainment of the required skills, knowledge and understanding for each National Course.

There is no requirement to set additional mock or prelim exams or homework tasks for the purpose of determining a learner estimate. Teachers and lecturers are also not required to mark non-question paper components that would have been externally marked by SQA. An estimate is a judgement of a grade and band based on a holistic review of a learner’s performance in the assessment evidence available.

The integrity of the estimates we receive this year is very important as it will provide the core element of the certification process, in the absence of national performance data such as marked question paper and non-question paper components.

Therefore, to assist SQA in the awarding and certification process for 2020, we are taking steps to refine the existing system and ensure it is as fair and robust as possible. Firstly, we will be subdividing each existing band and asking teachers and lecturers to place their learners within these band categories. Secondly, we will be asking teachers and lecturers to rank order their learners within each estimated grade.

This will provide SQA with the information needed to allow us to adjust estimates where necessary, to ensure consistency both across the country and in comparison with previous years. This process may be informed by previous subject and qualification performance at both a national and centre level and prior attainment information where that is available.

We will provide detailed guidance to schools and colleges on how to determine and submit this refined estimate information after Easter, and by 20 April 2020. In the meantime, we ask that they do not submit estimates to us.

We understand that teachers and lecturers will need time to access evidence and have departmental and faculty discussions, in order to provide this information. We are also conscious that this will be more challenging with school and college closures. **We are therefore extending the existing deadline for receiving these estimates to 29 May, from the original date of 24 April.**

Any estimates data already received will be processed and shared back to schools and colleges for reference in completing the information we now require.

A free post-results service to ensure that schools and colleges continue to have a mechanism to question any result will be available, with full details to follow.

**National 5 coursework**

Last week I announced, that due to the latest public health advice on social distancing, we would not be marking coursework for Higher and Advanced Higher courses. I also said that we had already received coursework for a range of National 5 subjects and had contacted National 5 coursework markers to confirm marking arrangements.

While considering the required arrangements, it has become clear that we can no longer proceed with the marking of the National 5 coursework received to date, in a safe and secure manner, that maintains the integrity of national standards.

I know this will be disappointing news to many of you. We have taken this difficult decision to be as fair as possible to all National 5 learners, whilst responding to the real risks to our operations, including current public health guidance, the safe receipt and delivery of coursework materials and difficulties in delivering some of the key processes remotely, which are so central to the work we do each year.

We will not be returning National 5 coursework to schools and colleges, but we hope that the coursework may be used at a later stage, as part of an appeals service.

We also do not require centres to submit marks for internally assessed coursework.

**Approach to quality assurance and certification for National 2, National 3 and National 4 courses and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6, and 7**

As you will know, National 2, National 3 and National 4 qualifications are made up of units, and an added value unit at National 4, which are internally assessed as pass or fail by the school or college, and externally quality assured by SQA.

Schools and colleges should provide unit results based on either existing evidence from assessments that have already been completed, and/or using their professional judgement of other learner evidence, including their knowledge of their learners, their progress and achievements to date. The results should be submitted to us, in the normal way, **by 22 May for schools**, and **by 1 June for colleges**.

Given the current situation, the usual level of external verification is not possible, and we have therefore decided to postpone all remaining planned external verification activity. Schools and colleges have their own quality assurance systems and processes, which should be used to verify the appropriateness of these internal assessment outcomes and certification.

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.

**Approach to quality assurance and certification for National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses, and Awards**

We are asking schools, colleges, employers and training providers to provide the results of their internal assessment decisions, where some evidence from the course already exists but further progress is not possible, and/or using their professional judgement of other learner evidence, including their knowledge of their learners, their progress and achievements to date. The results should be submitted to us, in the normal way, reflecting the achievements of learners.

Again, given the current situation, the usual level of external verification is not possible. We will therefore reduce external verification and will undertake a reasonable level of quality assurance remotely, to support the safe and secure delivery of our qualifications, whilst recognising the current challenges we all face. We are working at pace with stakeholders, to agree the appropriate conditions of assessment and quality assurance arrangements for each of these qualifications and awards and will be able to update in the coming days.

Schools, colleges, employers and training providers have their own quality assurance systems and processes, which should be used to verify the appropriateness of these internal assessment outcomes and certification. All assessment evidence should be retained until December 2020. Other activity planned for session 2019-20 will be reviewed and where appropriate moved to academic session 2020-21.

**In conclusion**

I hope this update is helpful to you. I would like to thank you for your support and your patience during this exceptionally difficult time. I fully appreciate that this is an uncertain time for learners who have worked hard throughout the year and will now, with their families, be worried about what this means for them. By working together, we can ensure that their hard work is rightly and fairly recognised through our qualifications system.

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