

## Joint Articulation Group Statement to College and University Sectors on Articulating Students

1. Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland set up a Joint Articulation Group (JAG) in response to concerns about the impact of the pandemic on the ability of students to successfully articulate in 2021, which were raised in the [Covid-19 Learner Journey Ministerial Taskforce](#). JAG is looking at immediate articulation issues but will then shift focus to taking forward articulation, building on the National Articulation Forum report published in 2020.
  2. We are aware that colleges and universities have gone to great lengths to support all their students in their studies over the course of the pandemic. We know that colleges and universities have been carefully considering how to support new and continuing students and that this will include arrangements for articulating students. JAG has looked at this issue across the sector and wishes to make some points that universities and colleges might find useful. Our aim is to support fair access and widening participation, for which articulation plays an important part. We also have some information on changes to SQA's arrangements for the assessment of students on HN courses this year, which we hope will assist universities.
- In this academic year, some students will complete HN qualifications with a credit deficit. Universities might find it possible to allow students to articulate with a credit deficit, with the missing learning taking place once the university course has commenced. JAG encourages colleges and universities to explore opportunities to do this.
  - Colleges should consider encouraging students who do not have an offer, but wish to articulate, to contact universities now to see if they might be able to get an offer at this stage rather than wait until the main Clearing period in August.

### Articulating with fewer credits

3. Some students have not been able to complete their studies this year. In particular, HNC students who wish to articulate are often required to take additional credits to top up a HNC from 96 credits to 120 credits. This may not have been possible this year. **We are asking universities to be as flexible as possible and consider allowing students to articulate with a credit deficit where this is appropriate.**
4. We recognise that this will not be possible or desirable in all circumstances. Where this is possible, universities and colleges should consider how students can be supported to achieve these credits in a way that supports successful articulation and, ultimately, successful completion

of a degree. This may present logistical challenges around timing and allocation of resources that will need creative solutions. Students should be involved in these discussions.

## SQA information

5. We attach information from SQA, which sets out their arrangements for certification in 2021:

- 2020-21 Alternative Assessment Approaches for Higher National Certificate/Diploma Awards (below)
- Appendix 1 – HN decision tree
- Appendix 2 - HNC/D alternative assessment guidance spreadsheet

6. In the vast majority of cases, these changes do not impact learning outcomes, but they do change how the achievement of these learning outcomes is assessed. This is a similar approach to the changes in school qualifications and, indeed, to changes to university modules and assessments. The only exception to this is where a ‘theory only’ framework has been created because placements were not available (see below). The standard of HN qualifications remain the same in either case.

7. SQA introduced new ‘theory only’ frameworks for four awards for the Care sector because the original awards require work placements which were not possible for all candidates during 2020-21. This has been the case for HNCs in Social Services and Childhood Practice. The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is fully supportive of these ‘theory only’ awards and have confirmed that candidates completing these awards will be accepted for registration with a condition that the work placement requirements will be completed within a specified time period.

8. SQA reviewed its approaches to assessment for all qualification types for 2020/21 and the outcome of the review included the removal of the mandatory need for candidates to complete specific assessment of Graded Units in HNC and HNDs. This introduced flexibility for centres and candidates to decide upon the most appropriate approach to assessment which would contribute to grading – either through specific assessment of Graded Units or through reviewing evidence generated during completion of the units across an award. Centres are at liberty to continue with arrangements which best suit the teaching, learning and assessment needs of deliverers and learners. Whichever approach is taken, learners will receive a quality assured grade with no change to the number of credit points achieved. There are a small number of exceptions to this arrangement where the specific assessment of the Graded Unit is a mandatory requirement linked with registration with a professional association or which have mandatory responsibilities under a Qualification Partnership Agreement.

## Supporting Applicants

9. Colleges should be aware that some universities have made offers that mention Graded Units. Universities are aware that Graded Units may have been assessed differently this year.

10. Given the additional consideration that universities will have to give to articulating applicants this year, we strongly recommend that **learners’ results are sent to universities as early as possible** so that places can be confirmed quickly.

11. We are aware that places in some subjects and/or institutions may be limited this year. However, there may be places in other institutions. **We recommend colleges support any learners who wish to articulate but do not have a place to contact the university (or universities) they are interested in now, rather than waiting until the main Clearing period in August.**

## 2020-21 Alternative Assessment Approaches for Higher National Certificate/Diploma Awards

### Background

During academic session 2020/21, SQA worked in partnership with delivering centres to provide support and alleviate the assessment concerns of both practitioners and learners, given the impact of COVID-19 restrictions. This led to a number of alternative assessment approaches for Higher National Awards being put in place for Session 2020/21. These include:

- Combined assessment toolkit to assist practitioners and reduce assessment load.
- Subject specific guidance on adaptations to assessment.
- Removal of the requirement to complete the assessment for Graded Units with HNC/D awards and Advanced Certificates and Diplomas.
- Local assessment adaptations, where required.
- Further specific guidance on adaptations to assessment and the identification of critical competences for some awards.

These alternative assessment approaches are underpinned by the SQA Core Principles of:

- fairness to all learners.
- safe and secure certification of qualifications, while following the latest public health advice.
- maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualification system, ensuring that standards are maintained over time, in the interests of learners and end users.
- meeting our public sector equality duties to eliminate discrimination, foster good relations and create equality of opportunity
- considerations of practicality and operational impact of any approach.

SQA has not modified the content of the HNCs and HNDs and the standards have been maintained.

Restrictions during 2020/21 resulted in a shortage of opportunities for candidates to gain work placement experience so alternative, theory only, frameworks were created for the following four awards:

- GR8V 15 HNC Social Services (theory only)
- GK9T 15 HNC Childhood Practice (theory only)
- GR8W 46 PDA Education Support Assistance (theory only)
- GR91 46 NC Early Education and Childcare (theory only)

### Status

The alternative assessment approaches provide optional routes for delivering centres who are facing challenges. They have been developed with flexibility to allow centres to decide which, if any, approaches they need to utilise. Appendix 1 is the Decision Tree that illustrates the routes available.

The alternative assessment approaches available to delivering centres focus on practicability and associated adaptations/approaches to support centres and candidates completing HN awards under the restrictions associated with the Covid pandemic. They have allowed the focus of assessment to be on the key critical outcomes of the awards. The exercise looked for opportunities to reduce assessment where there was natural duplication across outcomes and units. Critical to the publication

of these alternative approaches was that the standard of the qualification would not be compromised in any way. Where appropriate, Sector Skills Council and Regulatory Bodies were consulted, to ensure that any adaptations to assessment were agreed and approved. There was also extensive consultation with our delivering centres and senior subject appointees. The evidence requirements in the Higher National frameworks, have in some cases, been adjusted slightly and assessments modified to mitigate the impact of Covid restrictions, but the overall content remains unchanged and there is no dilution of the standards.

Appendix 2 contains all the current HNC/D awards and links to any specific guidance on adaptations to assessment and identified critical competences. The delivery model for all Higher National Awards has altered over the academic session 2020/21 with a move towards remote delivery, a reduction in face-to-face learning to adhere to the prevailing public health restrictions and to provide the required support to learners. Specifications for each of the HNC/Ds can be found on the SQA website<sup>1</sup>.

### **Recommendations**

We invite the members of the Joint Articulation Group to note the points made in the paper and the information provided in the accompanying appendix.

*Appendix 1 – HNVQ 2020/21 Decision Tree*

*Appendix 2 – HNC/D alternative assessment guidance spreadsheet*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/25147.2550.html>