

The stakeholder engagement was held principally in two rounds, the first between September 15<sup>th</sup> and September 30<sup>th</sup>; the second between November 1<sup>st</sup> and November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021.

In the first round in particular, a range of options were considered as an approach to setting grade boundaries in the context of a return to formal assessments and examinations as the central planning assumption in 2022. SQA is keen to take all necessary steps to ensure that the examination system does what it is designed to do, providing fairness and controls through standardised assessment, test taking conditions and marking; but also recognise the need for transition and some different dimensions to include in the approach in 2022 given the impacts of the pandemic. Some of the different dimensions of the approach in 2022 include the use of modifications to assessments in 2022. This is an important feature as it will have a bearing not only on lessening the learner burden and stress in the approach to assessments, but also, likely, on improving performance standards compared to what they might be without such modifications.

The options considered for discussion were

1. seeking outcomes more similar to 2020/2021
2. as above but with greater differentiation in the higher grade such as 'A band 1'
3. following normal awarding processes only (Option 3)
4. as above but with a 'safety net' of outcomes not dipping below 2019 outcomes
5. an intermediary position between 2021 outcomes and pre-pandemic outcomes, based on expert judgement used in normal awarding processes.

Presentation of the options was also accompanied by a consideration of the relative importance of different principles or aims of awarding – including aligning outcomes and grades with performance standards, fairness between learners across adjacent cohorts, fairness between learners across a longer period, managing how qualification results feed into the rest of the ecosystem, ensuring the long term integrity of qualifications through supporting the validity and meanings of grades, and giving learners a 'softer-landing' in the context of pandemic-related disruption.

In discussion of these principles and aims, it is clear that there is no option which can meet all the principles; and indeed all options have some drawbacks. The discussions therefore focused on identifying the option with the greatest propensity to meet the principles as far as possible, with the smallest negative impacts.

## **First round of discussions – September 2021**

### **General comments**

- The education system is still facing disruption and 2022 cannot be considered as a normal year.
- Any approach taken will also need to factor in the impact of COVID-related disruption in session 2022/23 but after that could reasonably hope that learners studying for qualifications will have recovered from disruption.
- Cohorts impacted by the last two or three years cannot fairly be compared to 2019 or before. An immediate return to 2019 outcomes would be “disastrous for children” and would not be possible as courses and assessment have changed and are not directly comparable.
- An approach that recognises and reflects this point will gain greater public confidence than one that appears too harsh (i.e., a return to something closer to 2019 than 2021 outcomes).
- Modifications were designed to mitigate against impact of disruption and support learners to succeed. Feedback suggests that they are having an impact in this respect, however, impact is unknown and variable

- Returning to 'normality' is an important goal but should be over two or three years (e.g., 'glide path' or 'stepping-stone' approach), with 2022 treated in isolation as a transition year.
- Retaining professional expert judgement at the heart of the awarding process was considered vital – outcomes should not be statistically driven.
- The awarding process may need to be adapted and flexibility will be required to account for differences between courses and subjects.
- Whatever approach we adopt carries significant communications challenges particularly around the use of statistics based on experience of ACM 2020 - some warned against providing any technical details of the awarding process.
- We need to consider the place of appeals in the overall model and how this may operate in a different way from a normal year.
- There is also a risk of a large volume of appeals/PRS if centres hold evidence from in-year assessment that in their view indicates a higher grade than the learner achieves in the exam.
- There is a risk that if outcomes are too far from 2021, learners who know they have been estimated a grade they are happy with will opt not to take the exam and seek to bank the estimate.
- Fairness to learners needs to be at the heart of our approach: whilst this has a number of dimensions, for most it will be judged by how the class of 2022 performs compared to the class of 2021

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

[Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]
  - [Redacted]
  - [Redacted]
  - [Redacted]
- S30(b)(ii)

**Second round (1<sup>st</sup> November to 3<sup>rd</sup> November):**

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

[Redacted]

- [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] S30(b)(ii)

## Conclusions

Stakeholder engagements overall coalesced around support for the Option to **use normal awarding processes and adopt boundaries to reflect an intermediary position for outcomes between 2021 and pre-pandemic**

In discussing these principles and aims, it was clear to stakeholders that no single approach could meet all the principles fully or were without drawbacks. As a stepping stone approach, the intermediary position most fully meets aims and principles. It was generally acknowledged that it represented a pragmatic balance between the pure standards position but recognises the situation this year. The strong stakeholder support for this position means that it is informed by the diverse yet particular needs and views of students, school and college leaders, and universities.