

ANGUS COUNCIL  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
21 NOVEMBER 2000

**A TARGET SUBMISSION DATE FOR THE RESULTS OF NATIONAL UNITS CONTRIBUTING TO  
NATIONAL COURSES: SQA CONSULTATION PAPER**

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this report is to bring to the attention of the Education Committee details of the above consultation paper and of the officer response already submitted to SQA.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- (a) notes the terms of the SQA proposal **to bring forward to 30 April the final date for submission of all data** relating to internally assessed components of national courses and estimates of candidate achievement for national courses at Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher (attached as Appendix 1)
- (b) notes and endorses the response to the consultation paper prepared by officers of Angus Council Education Department (attached as Appendix 2)
- (c) notes the concerns held in relation to the SQA proposal

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The consultation paper was issued with a covering letter on 23 October 2000 to **Head Teachers** and copied to Directors of Education and others; responses were invited **by no later than 3 November 2000**. An officer response has been sent to SQA to comply with that timescale.
- 2.2 Members will be aware of the details of the motion approved by the Education Committee at its meeting of 22 August 2000 (Article 1 refers) in response to the major crisis which affected the Scottish Qualifications Authority's procedures in issuing results of candidates performance in the 2000 examination diet.
- 2.3 Members will also be aware of a similar motion approved by Angus Council at its meeting of 14 September 2000 (Article 4 refers). Both motions included a call for the Scottish Executive "to indicate ..... the precise steps which have been taken to guarantee that this year's difficulties will not recur in the 2001 diet".
- 2.4 The attached SQA consultation paper describes an understandable attempt to address the not inconsiderable difficulties experienced by SQA in handling data in respect of the 2000 diet. It would appear that the rationale for choosing 30 April as the main date for submission of key assessment data is that this will enable SQA to manage data more effectively and to be in a position – as they appear not to have been this year – to take corrective action where necessary well in advance of August certification.
- 2.5 The paper lists possible advantages (9) and possible disadvantages (3) and seeks responses from **Head Teachers** via a simple proforma.

**3 KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN THE RESPONSE PREPARED BY OFFICERS OF THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**

- 3.1 The attached response has been prepared by officers of the Education Department in consultation with Secondary School Higher Still Co-ordinators.

- 3.2 The response acknowledges the procedural attractiveness of establishing a date which would allow SQA awards processing systems more time to manage more effectively the volume of Higher Still data than regrettably was the case in respect of the 2000 diet. However, it is entirely possible that the revised submission date of 30 April may have the opposite effect – it is difficult to understand how the Scottish Qualifications Authority would be in a position to cope with a possible avalanche of data in April/May when its awards processing systems spectacularly failed to cope with a similar input of data in respect of the 2000 diet.
- 3.3 Even if the revised target date were to enable SQA to manage data assessment accurately and timeously, the negative implications for learning and teaching in Higher Still courses are significant. Teaching time would be significantly reduced; in practice it may well be the case that the “notional” course length of 160 hours for Higher Still courses would be reduced to 130 hours. This reduction would challenge the ability of schools and teachers to manage the internal assessment and reassessment procedures which are integral elements of national courses.
- 3.4 Given the experience of teachers and pupils of internal assessment procedures related to the 2000 diet, it is almost inevitable that the revised target date of 30 April would result in a log-jam of internal assessments in the run up to April 30. The inevitable outcome of this would be assessment overload for Higher Still candidates in 2001.
- 3.5 The attached response, as well as indicating other disadvantages not addressed in the SQA consultation paper, also offers alternative proposals to simplify procedures [B.1]; these proposals include a suggestion [B.8] that until such time as the SQA processing system can cope with the volume of data which derives from Higher Still internal assessment arrangements – such arrangements should be simplified or abandoned.
- 3.6 **In the absence of early steps to revise SQA procedures which schools must carry out**, it is difficult to be confident that the 2001 diet will not be affected at least in part by the type of difficulties which brought so much disquiet to so many of last year’s candidates and their families.
- 3.7 The consultative response has been shared with and endorsed by the Council’s Higher Still Strategy Group whose membership includes a member of each Angus Secondary School’s senior management team.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 While the SQA proposal might well meet its administrative needs, it will almost certainly fail to meet the needs of teachers and pupils. The proposal represents a major shift from the original assessment model proposed for the Higher Still framework and should, therefore, be rejected in favour of options which are more responsive to the needs of schools, teachers and above all, candidates.

#### **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### **6 CONSULTATION**

In accordance with the standing orders of the Council this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Law and Administration and the Director of Finance.

JIM ANDERSON  
DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

**NOTE:** No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.



# <sup>h</sup> National Qualifications

## A target submission date for the results of National Units contributing to National Courses

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### Consultation Paper

## 1. Introduction

This consultation paper seeks the views of centres and other key partners on proposals to introduce a target submission date arrangement for National Units, which contribute to National Courses at Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher. It is not applicable to project-based National Courses or National Units taken on an incremental or free-standing basis. It is also not applicable to SCE Highers and CSYS, where existing arrangements for submission of data on components and estimates will apply in 2001 as outlined in the relevant Conditions and Arrangements Handbook.

## 2. Establishing Submission Dates

In order to avoid recent data processing problems between centres and the SQA and to avoid further confusion it is necessary to establish submission date norms. A number of key submission dates will be introduced by SQA to support the external assessment arrangements for the 2001 summer examination diet. These recognise feedback from centres and will be:

- 31 March** - Final date for submission of all internal assessment grades and estimates for Standard Grades which is a return to previous arrangements.
  
- 30 April** - Final date for submission of all internally assessed components of National Courses which contribute to the external assessment arrangements, for example, the speaking mark for Modern Languages. (The timing of moderation should be similar to those set for the 2000 examinations, ie central moderation being held in April/May and visiting moderation from February onwards.)
  
- Final date for estimates of likely candidate achievement for National Courses at Intermediate 1 to Advanced Higher.

There were significant challenges encountered by SQA and centres at the summer 2000 examination diet in relation to the submission of results information for National Units which contribute to National Courses. Our view is that all necessary steps must be taken to ensure a more effective approach to avoid a repetition of data transfer problems between SQA and centres. Retaining 30 June as the completion date for the majority of Course component Units is not a sustainable option.

This consultation paper develops and seeks your views on the advantages and disadvantages of moving to a target date for the submission of results for National Units contributing to National Courses to be certificated in August. It does not apply to candidates undertaking National Units on an incremental or free-standing basis where current arrangements can continue to apply. Centres are also free to provide final unit results in advance of the date proposed below, if required.

### **Possible disadvantages include:**

- ◆ Reduced flexibility in quality assurance arrangements. For example, centrally moderated National Units completing in October/November could under existing arrangements be moderated in December, providing early feedback to centres on remedial action required, if necessary.
- ◆ Change to retention of evidence. Centres would be required to retain evidence for all National Units until end May (although centres have the option to retain evidence to support assessment appeals).
- ◆ Reluctance of centres to release staff for moderation duties prior to the examination period.

## **4. Current Arrangements**

The current arrangements for completion dates for National Units contributing to National Courses are:

- ◆ One unit, chosen by the centre, must have a completion date of 31 March. Earlier and later completion dates can be provided.
- ◆ Other component units can have completion dates up to 30 June.
- ◆ Quality assurance arrangements for those centres selected for central moderation processes effectively happen in December or April/May. However, postal moderation can be carried out throughout the session.
- ◆ Retrospective moderation, which has no effect on August certification of candidates, takes place in September and samples units completing in the period post April.

### **Possible advantages to current arrangements are:**

- ◆ Spreads workload throughout teaching year.
- ◆ Retention of flexible approach to completion dates.
- ◆ Quality assurance procedures would be carried out in line with given completion dates.
- ◆ Avoids the need to retain unnecessary candidate evidence.

### **Possible disadvantages include:**

- ◆ Completion date of end June permits no flexibility for centres to resolve outstanding results queries with SQA prior to August certification.
- ◆ Clash with timetables exams.

**Please indicate your preferred option:**

**1. Do you accept the proposal of introducing a target submission date norm of 30 April?**

Yes

No

**2. Do you prefer the current arrangements to apply?**

Yes

No

**3. If you answered No to both questions above please indicate what target date would be acceptable.**

Any comments?

Please give the name of a contact in your centre whom we could contact to clarify comments, if necessary.

Name

\_\_\_\_\_

Designation

\_\_\_\_\_

Telephone No.

\_\_\_\_\_

Have you enclosed written comments with this form?

Yes

No

**Thank you for completing this form and taking part in this consultation.**





**Angus Council: an Officer Response to SQA Consultation Paper  
“National Qualifications - A target submission date for the results of  
National Units contributing to National Courses”.**

A. The target date of 30 April is obviously attractive and convenient to SQA but would appear to be less attractive to schools. Problems resulting from this proposal include the following:

- Flexibility with respect to the submission of unit test results is removed. Effectively, the final date for unit test results has been moved forwards five months from the end of September to the end of April.
- An even greater log jam of internal assessments would result from subject departments assessing/reassessing units in the run-up to April 30 with pupil overload resulting from this.
- The teaching time for courses would be significantly reduced. It appears that the 'notional' course length of 160 hours is being questioned /eroded by SQA. This proposal may reduce the effective teaching time per course to 130hours i.e. the additional 40 hours for assessment/reassessment etc. has been reduced by 75%.
- The opportunity to assess/reassess units during the SQA exam diet is removed.
- Pupils may enter the exam diet with an incomplete unit profile and this may affect their morale.
- Costs may increase as candidates may have to be re-entered for the units that they failed to achieve in the previous year.
- Applies to schools only-Why?
- No mention of procedures for the forthcoming Winter diet of exams.
- The time-line is inappropriate given the current demands of unit assessment.
- The proposals appear to meet the short-term needs of SQA but do not meet the needs of schools and teachers and represent a major shift from the original assessment model proposed for the Higher Still framework of courses and units.
- It is difficult to understand how SQA can cope with an avalanche of data in April/May when the Awards Processing System spectacularly failed to cope with a similar input of data in 2000.

B. Alternative proposals include:

1. NABs should be simplified to reflect their real status as a progress milestone on the road to a course award. This may involve: reducing the number of discrete tests by making all NABs holistic, simplifying questions to below level C and modifying making schemes and cut-off scores to reflect the real level of demand.
2. SQA should ensure that a minimum of 5 NABs are available for all units.
3. The moderation of written NABs should commence after the start of the SQA exam diet. Schools must retain the ability to alter a candidate's unit test profile beyond this date to allow for the reassessment of unit tests during the exam diet.

4. Schools should be encouraged to trickle results to SQA throughout the year. As most schools use electronic submission of results, this should not slow the handling or processing of data later in the year and should actually facilitate this process. Mid-June should be the date by which the unit results to be incorporated into the current year's certificate are sent to SQA. [However, please refer to proposal 8 in light of current difficulties.]
5. Notify centres of the subjects and levels to be moderated well in advance of the date of the moderation event.
6. Allow schools to select, using a prescribed SQA algorithm, the candidates whose work is to be moderated thus saving SQA the computer time and effort for this.
7. Set SQA's system to default at "Pass", with schools providing evidence to the contrary.
8. Scrap internal assessment until the system can cope.
9. Listen to schools and teachers as informed users of the assessment system.
10. Process data as and when it reaches SQA and confirm data input with schools by return.