

SIMS Examinations Organiser 6

AQA Basedata Issues, June 2009

The Problem

A problem has arisen with two specifications in the AQA catalogue. Fundamentally, the issue is the same: a hybrid qualification that may serve as a certification at one level, and/or a unit at another. The two items affected are:

- 1) In Series 6A09_70, the FSMQ/A options, where a result may be counted either as a certification in its own right, with a grade that looks like a GCE grade (Gradeset A), but with one-third of the equivalence of the corresponding grade at AS; or as a GCE unit, counting as one-third of an AS certification.
- 2) In Series 6V09_70, Syllabus 9305, Functional Skills Mathematics, where the two options for Level 2, Paper (93001P) and Screen (93001S), may serve either as a certification at Functional Skills with a result expressed as a level 1 or 2 (Gradeset L), or as a GCSE Unit with a maximum score of 200.

For almost a year, we have been pressing on AQA our case that it is not possible to present such items in a single record, either basedata or result, without misrepresentation, and that the appropriate way to deal with them would be to issue two basedata records, with a mutual disallowance declared to prevent double entry, and follow this with two result records, one defined as a GCE or GCSE unit with a UMS score, the other as a FSMQ or FSKL certification with a result grade.

We have also urged for some years that the Formats be updated to allow a result type 1 to comprise a grade accompanied by a mark, e.g. to indicate the total UMS score underlying the grade assigned – effectively the converse of a UMS score accompanied by a grade.

When Version 11 of the Formats book was released in April, it introduced the Item code (O-file byte 22) of 'B' for Both. Unfortunately, no further information was given as to how this was to be interpreted in terms of the results to be issued. As far as we are concerned, a Certification expects a Grade (result type 1), because the PI process deals only in grades. A Unit will normally, but not necessarily, have a numeric result because of the totting-up process, result type U, which may, or may not, be accompanied by an indication of what final certification grade would be issued if this level of performance were maintained across all units. This is what EO6 refers to as an 'Equivalent'. It is important to note that this is NOT a result, and EO6 is careful to preserve the distinction.

In the event, the issue of basedata for June 2009 shows an inconsistency of approach. The FSMQ/A items are defined as Item B (Both), but with a result type of U. Exams Organiser does not recognise Item 'B', so import fails. If Item were set to 'U' (Unit), this would have the effect of permitting the Element properties to be set to Result Type = 'U', Max Mark = 100, Equivalent Gradeset = 'JCQ A'. Results would import successfully, but the FSMQ certification would be disguised as an Equivalent, and would therefore not be recognised by the PI data collection process. If Item is set to 'C' (Certification), EO6 will not know what to do with a certification result that is not a grade, so no result configuration data will be imported, and results issued in August will similarly fail to import. In the interests of PI, the best compromise is to set Item to 'C', and replace result type (byte 80) with '1'. This will make 'official' AQA results unimportable, but they may be entered via a marksheet, and so allow the system to present and process the FSMQ certification as it is.

Though conceptually identical, the FSKL Maths specification has not been treated in the same way. Both options are issued as Item = 'C', but again with result type = 'U', which, as with FSMQ, leads to failure to import the result configuration properties. Users who have imported these

items from basedata will not have been alerted to the fact that there is a problem, and may well not have noticed it.

In this case, our preferred solution is again to replace the result type 'U' with '1', which will enable the gradeset information to be imported, but not the maximum mark. Our reason for this preference is an awareness that many schools have a policy of entering candidates for Functional Skills in addition to the corresponding GCSE subjects, to take advantage of the fact that FSKL certifications are assigned for AAT purposes to different discount families. The probability is that again the AQA result files will fail to import because of the mismatch of result types, but it will be possible to enter results by marksheet.

On the question of discount codes, it is obvious that this presents a further drawback of the one-record system. AQA have got round this by not populating the field at all, and it is not at all clear what the value should be. Our internal PI calculation process recognises 0022 and 0023 (Adult Literacy and Numeracy) and HD2 and HD4 (Communication and Numeracy).

The Solution

1. FSMQ

A replacement O6A09_70.x01 file is available for download from SupportNet, resource number 14964. The main changes are to replace, for option codes 6990, 6991, 6992, 6994, 9992, 9993, 9994, 9995, 9996 and 9997, the Item code 'B' with 'C', and Result Type 'U' with '1'. We expect results to be issued with result type 'U', so that import is likely to fail, and manual input will be required.

Although 'Both' implies a certification, AQA have not supplied discount codes for these items. Research in the DCSF's QAN database reveals the following values:

Code	Level	Discount	QAN	Title
6990	FSMQA	2460	10006813	FSMQ USING & APPLYING STATS(A)
6991	FSMQA	2370	10006801	FSMQ ALGEBRAIC & GRAPH TECH(A)
6992	FSMQA	2440	10006758	FSMQ MODELLING WITH CALC (A)
6994	FSMQA	2215	10055800	FSMQ USING & APP DEC MATHS (A)
9993	FSMQA	2215	10064497	FSMQ DATA ANALYSIS (ADV)
9995	FSMQA	2215	10064503	FSMQ DYNAMICS (ADV)
9996	FSMQA	2215	10064485	FSMQ MATHEMATICAL PRINC. (ADV)
9997	FSMQA	2300	50040078	FSMQ DECISION MATHEMATICS(ADV)
9998	FSMQA	2440	5004008X	FSMQ CALCULUS (ADV)

It is obvious that as much thought has gone into this as into most of QCA's recent work in this area. Where they couldn't find an obvious match they've simply supplied the catch-all 2215, even though there's no obvious reason why, for example, Data Analysis should be discounted against Mathematical Principles. Nevertheless, the replacement file supplies the values as given, and users may need to make their own local adjustments to prevent inappropriate discounting.

All Level F and I options are represented by QCA as 2215. These values to have been added to the replacement file, although, again, if users have entered candidates for more than one of these, the values may require local adjustment.

2. Functional Mathematics

A replacement O6V09_70.x01 file is available for download from SupportNet, resource number 14965. In the Result Type field (byte 80) 'U' has been replaced by '1' to enable the certification to be recorded. We do not anticipate that these will import correctly from the result file, so manual input will be required. QCA code 0023 (Adult Literacy) has also been inserted.

Please note that both these basedata sets are at revision .x01. Should AQA identify a need to re-issue either basedata set, the .x01 extension on these files will cause them to be superseded in the import process by a higher revision number. Our strong advice is therefore NOT to refresh these items from any basedata issued by AQA.

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