

TEACHER PANEL

SENIOR PHASE RETURN AND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2021

Purpose

1. This short paper is intended to assist the Teacher Panel with its discussion in relation to reflections on the 2021 National Qualifications, including the impact of remote learning and the timing of return to school on these arrangements.

Current context

2. Following cancellation of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2021, SQA has been working in partnership with stakeholders via the National Qualifications 2021 Group to develop an alternative certification model (ACM).
3. The National Qualification 2021 Group is chaired by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and draws its membership from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), the Scottish Government, the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFIS) and the Scottish Youth Parliament.
4. On 16 February 2021, a revised ACM was published taking into account the current remote learning position. This includes an extension to the date for submission of provisional results to 25 June 2021, allowing greater time for learning and teaching and gathering of evidence.
5. The revised alternative certification model is based on five key stages:
 - Stage 1: ongoing until April 2021 – teachers and lecturers access subject-specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA.
 - Stage 2: April - May 2021 – school, college, training provider and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on assessment evidence from each school, college and training provider.
 - Stage 3: end May to 25 June 2021 – schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities and SQA work through final stages of local and national quality assurance and feedback, to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair.
 - Stage 4: by 25 June 2021 – schools, colleges and training providers submit quality assured provisional results to SQA.
 - Stage 5: Appeals process for 2020-21 – to be advised following consultation.
6. Following consultation last year, SQA also made modifications to its courses, including reductions to content and assessment requirements where relevant, to

compensate for disruption to learning whilst preserving the validity of the qualifications.

7. SQA has published 116 subject-specific guidance documents across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. These documents summarise the key pieces of evidence required as the basis for provisional results. They also highlight the option of separating and adapting assessments so that teachers and lecturers have the flexibility to assess learners at times and in ways that are appropriate to their needs.
8. In addition, 134 individual assessment resources have been published on the SQA secure website for supporting teachers and lecturers. These include new assessments that can be used, in part or in full, this session. The aim is to allow teachers and lecturers to take a pragmatic approach to delivery and focus their learning and teaching on the contexts/content required for assessment. The subject-specific guidance also highlights assessment conditions for generating evidence. Examples of how to use the assessment resources are also provided on the SQA website.
9. In line with expert advice, remote learning will continue for the majority of young people. The priority for schools and colleges at this time should be to maximise learning and teaching to ensure a solid foundation and course coverage, with final assessments of learner attainment to inform the provisional results taking place later in the 2020-21 session.
10. A small number of Senior Phase learners were able to return to school from 22 February to allow them to progress practical work that cannot be undertaken remotely and which is critical to completion of work towards qualifications. Technical guidance for secondary schools was published to explain the parameters of this limited return. We know that schools value flexibility and that they know their young people, and their needs best. As far as we could, we provided that flexibility and each school model could be designed to reflect the needs of its learners and subject uptake.
11. The First Minister has confirmed that remaining learners will be allowed to return to school on a part-time basis from 15 March with prioritisation for senior phase, and all returning full-time after the Easter break.
12. The Scottish Government recognises that learning from home presents a number of challenges for young people. National e-learning support is being provided via e-Sgoil, including a range of live webinar study support sessions over the Easter break for those who wish to continue their learning over the holiday period. This support will complement any planned local provision.

Points for discussion

13. Discussions with stakeholders, including meetings of the Teacher Panel, have been hugely influential in informing decisions and planning around the national qualifications this year.

14. The Teacher Panel is invited to feed back on the implementation of the alternative certification model and the impact of remote learning on learners. In particular:

- How does the panel assess the progress of learners who are studying for national qualifications this year given the current remote learning provision and expected timing and phasing of return to school-based learning?
- What reflections does the panel have on the impact of the limited return of some senior phase pupils for practical subjects?
- What level of engagement does the panel consider teachers have with the guidance and assessment material, including the understanding standards material, which have been produced by SQA, and is there any additional material or guidance the panel would want to see considered?

Learning Directorate
March 2021