

Enclosure 08. Submission – Analysis of 2019 SQA Results – Advice to DFM

TO: DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER

DEEPER ANALYSIS OF THE 2019 SQA RESULTS

Purpose

1. To update DFM on a potential approach to commissioning a full analysis of the 2019 SQA results, coordinated by the Scottish Government and involving Education Scotland, SQA, ADES and key stakeholders. The purpose is to explore the results in greater depth and consider what they might suggest about the current health of the Scottish education system, and to identify what further action might be required to help more young people to be as successful as possible.

Background

2. Since publication of the results on 6 August, the main commentary has focused on attainment at Higher and National 5, with some observers also noting the fall in the pass rate at National 4 and Advanced Higher. The implication from some quarters has been that this suggests a significant challenge within Scottish education. There has also been some very positive coverage on the huge increase in other awards of equal value to traditional qualifications, which help young people to thrive in the world of work or further and higher education].

3. Whilst you have been clear that variation is a natural phenomenon in a high-performing system where standards are maintained year on year, you have asked officials to consider how we could work with our partners to further explore the data and intelligence around this to ensure we fully understand these trends and the potential causes, and to address any issues where necessary.

Approach

4. We suggest that you commission a programme of work to take this analysis and investigation forward, . This would begin with an initial discussion with senior officials in SQA and Education Scotland, including the chief examiner and the chief inspector, and following this up with further, more detailed, work as required. You may wish to convene this first meeting to start the process off and outline your expectations.

5. We will examine entries, performance and trends on a subject-by-subject basis, and level-by-level. {Redacted S29 (1) (a)}

6. The work will also consider evidence around the broad general education and learners' preparedness for entering the senior phase and the full breadth of opportunities available in this phase of their education.

7. We will have several sources of information available to support these discussions:

- SQA's national data published on 6 August;
- Reports by the SQA Principal Assessors for each subject at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher level, which will indicate where the challenges have been in candidate performance this year - these will be published later this month;
- Further analysis from Scottish Government education analysts;

- Intelligence from Education Scotland subject specialists and inspection reports;
- Intelligence from SQA qualifications specialists;
- Information on the impact of skills-based qualifications;
- NIF measures, e.g. school leaver attainment (qualifications at a SCQF level or above).
- Reflections from education stakeholders, for example from members of the Curriculum and Assessment Board

8. Clearly, the local dimension will also be crucial in understanding variations and, in particular, in identifying where additional support might be required. SQA does not at this point have 32 variations of the national summary tables published on Tuesday – its data on schools is released to each local authority in an uncollated format which the LAs themselves then aggregate. However, last year, SQA was able to provide an initial cut of some of the LA breakdown by September and we have asked them to do so again.

9. In addition, we would propose to invite ADES to be represented in our work with SQA and Education Scotland, and if you agree we will approach Tony McDaid, Executive Director of Education Resources at South Lanarkshire Council, to attend the sessions.

Outcome

10. The aims of this work are to provide Ministers with a full understanding of the reasons for the variation in attainment at national and local level, and by subject, and to identify any improvements or further areas of support that are required.

11. Consideration will need to be given as to how to encourage the education sector as a whole to reflect on the results, what further support for learning and teaching, and raising attainment is required, and how we can collectively respond. {Redacted S29 (1) (a)}

Broader context

12. You have already agreed to a review of the senior phase of Curriculum for Excellence, announced earlier this year, following the debate on subject choice in May which received the backing of the Parliament. This should help us better understand how the curriculum is being implemented in schools (both the learning and teaching, as well as the curriculum design) and identify areas we can modify to ensure the best standard of education for our pupils. There are of course several possible approaches to this, such as a practitioner-led review, and, at some point in the future, the possibility of inviting back the OECD to conduct a full or rapid review. {Redacted S29 (1) (a)}

13. You have also been clear on the need to reflect on the findings of the Education and Skills Committee when it reports on its review of Subject Choice in the new parliamentary year, as well as the results of the national headteachers survey on their approaches to the Senior Phase curriculum. Other relevant forthcoming events include the Assessment Summit. Also relevant is the refreshed narrative on Scotland's curriculum and a strategic plan is being developed with Education Scotland to be enacted from this month and which seeks to maximise the positive impacts from the refreshed narrative.

14. You might also wish to invite the Curriculum and Assessment Board to consider the Results. CAB is scheduled to meet next on 18 September. The Teacher Panel may also wish to consider the results and next meets on 4 September.

Timescale

15. Clearly there is a need for this work to be carried out at pace. If you agree we will seek a date for the first meeting with the chief examiner, the chief inspector and ADES as soon as possible. We intend to continue the dialogue over the remainder of August and September, with a view to discussing our findings with you at the end of September.

{Redacted S29 (1) (a)}

Recommendation

16. **The DFM is invited to:**

- **Comment on the proposed approach and indicate whether he wishes to commission this work**
- **Indicate if he is happy for ADES to work with us on the initial investigation and analysis, agreeing that we contact Tony McDaid**
- **Indicate whether he wishes to chair the first meeting where expectations can be set out to the chief examiner, chief inspector, ADES representation and Learning Directorate senior officials**