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- Any communications (including letters, emails, text messages, typed or hand-written notes, phone calls or otherwise) between the Scottish Government and the SQA regarding the 2021 exam diet. I would like this information from 09 September 2020 to 07 October 2020.

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**Enclosure 01: Phone call**

Phone call between Deputy First Minister, John Swinney and SQA CEO, Fiona Robertson

**Enclosure 02: Email: SQA presentation for CERG today**

**From:** Gill Stewart <Gill.Stewart@sqa.org.uk>

**Sent:** 10 September 2020 09:07

**To:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>

**Cc:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk>

**Subject:** SQA presentation for CERG today

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Attached is the SQA presentation for today – at the relevant part of the agenda could you share this with the meeting?

Thanks Gill

Dr Gill Stewart

Director of Qualifications Development

t: 0345 213 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | e: gill.stewart@sqa.org.uk | w: <http://www.sqa.org.uk>  
Scottish Qualifications Authority The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, GLASGOW G2  
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## National Qualifications in 2021

### Session 2020/2021

- ◆ Modifications to assessment of National Courses, as far as possible, whilst retaining validity & credibility
- ◆ Changes to timetabling
- ◆ Contingencies if exam diet for 2021 is disrupted or cancelled in full or in part



# Modifications to assessment for 2021

## Guiding Principles

- ◆ Delivery & assessment of subjects constrained by current public health advice
- ◆ Increased learning & teaching opportunities
- ◆ A more flexible approach to assessment for learners, whilst retaining validity & credibility of qualifications for learners



## Consultation

- Open from 14 to 24 August
- 22,216 people accessed survey & 16,957 completed survey. Quantitative and qualitative responses
- 60% responses from practitioners, 22% from young people, 16% from parents & carers
- Written response key education groups
- Focus group with young people



## Analysis of qualitative responses

- 34 (of 112) proposals not supported mainly across mathematics, sciences, technical and practical subjects
- Qualitative feedback very helpful in identifying modifications
- Even where people agreed with proposal we analysed qualitative responses to identify best approach
- General feedback around equity for young people and consistency

## Types of Changes Made

- Modifying or removing coursework
- Removing exams
- Modifying exams to provide a narrower focus for assessment

Nature of subjects varies – mix of skills & knowledge  
- changes to assessment reflect this inherent variation  
EQIA and CRIA undertaken



## Modifications to respond to public health advice - examples

- Sciences & Engineering Science – removal of coursework at all levels given challenges of completing practical work.
- PE – N5 and H - one sports performance rather than two
- Geography – removing field work
- Additional guidance for Art & Design, Dance and Drama to assist with practical/performances



## Modifications to increase learning & teaching opportunities - examples

- English – removal of spoken language & reduction in folio
- Mathematics – introduce some optionality in exams at all levels
- Social subjects & sciences – removal of assignment & optionality in exam
- Psychology, Sociology – optionality in both exam & project
- Business subjects – optionality in exam & removal of assignment
- Languages – removal of some coursework.
- Art & Design, Design & Manufacture, Photography – more focused exams & a reduction of coursework
- Music – reduced performance times & removal of composing



## Modifications to give more flexibility for learners - examples

- Computing Science – N5 & H optionality in exam & coursework; AH removal of topic to reduce both exam & Coursework.
- Practical Electronics, Practical Metalworking, Practical Woodworking – removal of exam, earlier release practical tasks
- Practical Cookery, Practical Cake craft – exam retained, reduced coursework & more flexibility in how carry out practical work
- Music Technology – adjust assignment



# Timetabling Changes

## What we consulted on

- Option 1 – delay start date
- Option 2 – N5 first, then H and AH
- Change certification date from 10 to 19 Aug

## Who we consulted with

- Timetable Advisory Group , Advisory Council
- Young Scot, Youth Parliament, Children & Young Peoples Commissioner
- Markers

## What they said

- Mixed response – people in favour of later start to timetable but concerns re later certification date, concerns re markers availability
- Recommendation to retain existing timetable and certification date



# Contingencies for 2021

- Exam diet cannot take place
- Local lockdowns – extend submission dates for assessment evidence and data
- Individual absences – use exceptional circumstances consideration and expand capacity



**Enclosure 03: Email: In Confidence - Draft Opening Remarks**

**From:** Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>  
**Sent:** 15 September 2020 14:46  
**To:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Cc:** DirectorofLearning@gov.scot  
**Subject:** In Confidence - Draft Opening Remarks

Fiona

Further to your discussion with Graeme, please see below draft opening remarks for tomorrow's committee appearance.

Best wishes  
Malcolm

**Malcolm Pentland** | Deputy Director  
Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Division | email: malcolm.pentland@gov.scot | tel:+44(0) 131  
244 0047  
Learning Directorate | Area 2B North | Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ  
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**Enclosure 04: Email: RE: In Confidence - Draft Opening Remarks**

**From:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 15 September 2020 16:08  
**To:** Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>  
**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** RE: In Confidence - Draft Opening Remarks

Thanks Malcolm

Apologies for the slight delay in coming back to you. I offer some minor amendments in yellow.

Fiona

Fiona Robertson  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Qualifications Authority

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I am keenly aware that the sector wants clarity with regards to how national qualifications in 2021 will be assessed. The very real risk remains that there may be further disruptions for individual learners, individual schools and colleges, or more widely across the country during the course of the year. And there is no way of knowing what circumstances we will face in the spring of next year when, in normal circumstances, the exam Diet would take place.

That uncertainty and risk of further disruption makes identifying a fair and robust approach an incredibly difficult decision and there are a whole range of views on the best approach to take. To be clear, our ambition remains to run a 2021 examination diet, however, in these exceptional times we need to be sure that our approach remains appropriate to the circumstances. This is especially true as we are currently seeing a disturbing increase in the number of cases of the coronavirus, which has the potential to cause further disruption.

It is imperative consider fully the lessons of the 2020 national qualifications. Professor Priestley will be report the findings of his independent review soon, which will include recommendations for assessment this year and will be important in my consideration of the dilemma that we are facing. The **SQA and the** Education Recovery Group is also looking at contingencies in relation to exams.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority have also consulted on measures to modify course assessment for national qualifications this year **and the timetabling of exams**. Whilst I understand the need to share this with the system as soon as possible, I also believe that they need to be considered in

the context of the findings of the Priestley review. I want to provide as much certainty as possible in this time of great uncertainty and I have, therefore, asked the Chief Examiner to hold off on publishing her report while I await the outcome of Professor Priestley's Review. I have done so in order that the system can receive as much clarity and certainty as possible **on a range of related issues** at the start of October.

**Enclosure 05: Email: RE: Papers for CERG 26**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Sent:** 24 September 2020 17:11  
**To:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** RE: Papers for CERG 26

Hi Fiona

Sorry to hear you had connection problems this morning. We ended up getting kicked off the zoom meeting due to a clash with another user, so it may be that you didn't get the right alternative details. Apologies for the frustration and inconvenience; we'll work to ensure that doesn't happen again.

DFM ended the meeting by saying he wants to discuss the exam diet for 2021 at the next CERG meeting (Thursday 1 October @10am). I'm sure SG colleagues will be in touch – if they haven't already – but just thought I'd flag it here by way of a heads-up

Best wishes

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

**Enclosure 06: Email: RE: Papers for CERG 26**

**From:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 24 September 2020 17:46  
**To:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** RE: Papers for CERG 26

Thanks [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

I think the problem was with the connection here actually. But now sorted!

Thanks for the heads up on next week. That should be possible – and papers presumably need to be with you the day before? Speak soon.

Fiona

Fiona Robertson  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Qualifications Authority

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Midlothian EH22 1FD

**Enclosure 07: Email: RE: Papers for CERG 26**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

**Sent:** 24 September 2020 17:52

**To:** 'Fiona Robertson' <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>

**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>

**Subject:** RE: Papers for CERG 26

Excellent – thanks.

Yes, papers on Wednesday morning would be great.

Thanks again

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

**Enclosure 08: Email: CERG presentation**

**From:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 01 October 2020 09:03  
**To:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** CERG presentation  
**Importance:** High

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Grateful if you could upload this at the meeting today, so I can speak to it.

Also, can you invite Jean Blair and Gill Stewart to the meeting.

Many thanks

Fiona

Fiona Robertson  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Qualifications Authority

**t:** 0345 213 5000 | **w:** <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

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# National Qualifications in 2021: Proposition

CERG Meeting  
1 October 2020

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## Key elements of co –created proposition

- No exam diet for National 5, but plans for diet remain in place for Higher and Advanced Higher, with contingency
  - SQA publish outcomes of modifications, as planned
  - Exam timetable - 13 May to 4 June
  - Alternative model for National 5 based on validated centre estimates
  - Refreshed guidance for evidence gathering, estimation and quality assurance
  - Key decision checkpoints, including need to invoke contingency for Higher and Advanced Higher
  - System –wide buy in and support necessary
  - Joint communication and engagement
-

## Proposed Review Process

- SQA guidance on evidence gathering and estimation – focus on quality not quantity
  - Subject assessment guidance for each National 5 course support estimates
    - Identify 2-4 pieces of evidence
    - Assessment resources to support teachers
    - Webinar support on assessment
  - Support development of centre quality assurance approaches
  - Centres quality assure estimates prior to their submission – important role for Local Authorities and RICs in quality assurance of estimates
  - Co-create a model to sample centre assessment judgements –models being tested for operational viability
- 

## Challenges and risks

- Contestability and public confidence
  - Centres and SQA will be triple running processes with associated workload pressures for all and carries risk of error or failure to deliver
    - Alternative model for National 5 qualifications
    - Modified diet process for Higher and Advanced Higher
    - Contingency arrangements for Higher and Advanced Higher
  - Requirements to comply with public health advice means that working assumptions may need to be reviewed throughout the year and could create uncertainty - and present risks to safe and secure delivery of results in August
  - Timeline, dependencies (such as appointees) and decision points
-

**Enclosure 09: Email: Clarification**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Sent:** 05 October 2020 13:37  
**To:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk>  
**Subject:** Clarification

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Thanks for the call earlier – good to catch up.

Grateful if you could clarify one point – the SQA EQIA and Childs Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment...Does this refer to the Impact Assessments undertaken in light of decisions around 2020 Diet and/or proposed approach for 2021?

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)], Scottish Government, Area 2B North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ. Call: 07[Redacted s38(1)(b)] Email: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot

**Enclosure 10: Email: RE: Clarification**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 05 October 2020 13:37  
**To:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** RE: Clarification

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

These documents cover the modifications to course assessments of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in the 2020-21 session.

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

**Enclosure 11: Email: 2021 Qualifications -Letter from Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
**Sent:** 06 October 2020 23:42  
**To:** fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk  
**Cc:** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** 2021 Qualifications -Letter from Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and

Dear Fiona,

Please find attached a letter from the Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.

Kind regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills | The Scottish Government | Web: [www.gov.scot](http://www.gov.scot) | Tel: 0131 244 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Mob: 07[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Email: [DFMCSE@gov.scot](mailto:DFMCSE@gov.scot)

**Enclosure 11.1: Attachment: Letter from Deputy First Minister to Fiona Robertson, Chief Examining Officer, 6 October 2020**

Fiona Robertson  
Chief Examining Officer  
Scottish Qualifications Authority  
By email: [fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk](mailto:fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk)

6 October 2020

Dear Fiona

As you are aware, current circumstances and the continued impact of COVID-19 present the significant risk of disruption to the running of the exam diet in 2021. We have discussed this risk and options that exist in relation to it in detail and I am grateful to you for your advice on these matters.

It remains vitally important that we provide clarity to schools, colleges, young people, parents and the wider system on how the exam diet will proceed. I will set out detail on this in a statement to the Parliament tomorrow. After careful consideration of the risks and the views of stakeholders, and taking account of the recommendations made to me by Professor Mark Priestley following his independent review, I have decided that there should be no exams for National 5 qualifications in 2020-21.

I am asking that you cancel exams for National 5s in 2021 for a number of reasons. In my view there is a sound case in the current circumstances for prioritising examinations for Higher and Advanced Higher courses as exit qualifications for the majority of candidates. Cancelling exams for National 5s will create significant space to assist the successful and safe delivery of Higher and Advanced Higher examinations, both of which involve smaller numbers of candidates, which can be dispersed more readily across school and college buildings, therefore, enabling social distancing and other COVID-19 safety mitigations. This approach will also allow additional time for learning and teaching for Higher and Advanced Higher courses as you have confirmed that not having National 5 exams will allow the diet to start slightly later in the spring of 2021. Furthermore, a focus on exams for courses with smaller numbers of entries is more consistent with public health advice.

This approach also allows additional time for learning and teaching in late spring/summer of 2021 for the cohorts that have entered S3 and S4 this academic year and who have already experienced disruption to teaching time at the end of the 2019-20 academic year. In the absence of exams for National 5s, I am asking that the SQA collaborates with education stakeholders to develop an alternative approach to awarding National 5 qualifications that is based on teacher and lecturer judgement, supported by validated assessments. The approach should include the provision of:

- clear guidance for teachers, lecturers and exams centres on evidence gathering and estimation, with a clear focus on quality rather than quantity of that evidence;
- clear National 5 subject specific guidance that, where possible, includes absolute clarity on 2-4 key pieces of work that young people will complete for each course, which will be assessed in the classroom, to inform their final grade; and
- a support plan developed by the SQA, with Education Scotland, local authorities, regional improvement collaboratives and others to support a national approach to moderation and quality assurance, including the provision of assessment resources.

Alongside this, to ensure standards are maintained, I expect the SQA to work alongside exam centres during the year on the quality assurance of learners' work. Public health conditions allowing, the exam diet for Higher and Advanced Higher courses will proceed in 2021. This will be subject to the modifications that the SQA have identified following your consultation. You are also developing contingency plans in partnership with the education sector to allow awarding to go ahead in the event that Higher and Advanced Higher exams cannot proceed.

Finally, I wish to confirm that I will be publishing the report on the review completed by Professor Priestley tomorrow, along with the Government's response to his recommendations.

In doing so, I will reaffirm a commitment to clear communication about the way forward for awarding in 2021, and I know you share my commitment to that.

I appreciate that these continue to be very challenging times and that you and colleagues at SQA have been working incredibly hard and with great commitment, both in relation to 2020's qualifications and in relation to 2021. I remain very grateful to you and your staff for this.

**JOHN SWINNEY**

**Enclosure 12: Email: IN CONFIDENCE - DFM Statement and SG Response to Priestley Review**

**From:** Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>

**Sent:** 07 October 2020 14:23

**To:** Fiona Robertson (fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk) <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>

**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>

**Subject:** IN CONFIDENCE - DFM Statement and SG Response to Priestley Review

Fiona

In confidence at this stage, please find attached the final version of DFM's statement (now scheduled to be given at 16:00) and the SG response to the Priestley Review recommendations. The latter will be published on the SG website along with the Report when DFM gives his statement and we will send you a link to that then.

Best wishes

Malcolm

**Malcolm Pentland** | Deputy Director

Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Division | email: malcolm.pentland@gov.scot | tel:+44(0) 131 244 0047

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## Enclosure 12.1: Attachment: Speaking note

### DEPUTY FIRST MINISTER SPEAKING NOTE ASSESSMENT OF SQA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2020-21

#### Introduction

Presiding Officer,

As we have just heard from the First Minister, further restrictions are now necessary in order to bring R back below 1, stop the virus running out of control and save lives.

This is not, however, a return to the spring. We are not closing schools.

Instead, keeping them open is the priority.

We all know just how disruptive COVID-19 is to the awarding of national qualifications.

We found ourselves in a position where schools had closed with very little time to prepare. Course work was either incomplete or inaccessible.

And, of course, the exams could not go ahead.

There was no ready-made solution – we saw that from the fact the rest of the UK faced similar difficulties – but, in setting out our solution, the fact is we did not get it right for *all* young people. We apologised and we acted to fix the situation.

This year we have more time to prepare, but some things are still the same.

The virus remains with us.

It is still as virulent. It is still as infectious.

So, we cannot plan for business as usual. That is simply not possible.

Work towards exams would normally start back in May when the schools were still closed so pupils have already lost a significant amount of precious teaching time. And, we cannot predict – no-one can - how much more time might be lost to Covid-19 in the coming months.

Finally, we simply don't know what Spring and Summer will look like in terms of the public health position.

But, what we can do is three key things:

- we can learn from last year;
- we can consult our teachers and educationalists; and

- we can listen to the experts in the design of awarding systems.

And in every decision we take, we can hold fast to our shared aim to build an approach that recognises the hard work of individual pupils fairly and consistently.

It must be an approach that does not place undue burdens on them or on Scotland's teachers.

And, it has to be an approach that has the confidence of the public, of employers and of the rest of the education system.

That is what we have been doing over recent weeks and I can now set out to parliament the progress we have made and the conclusions we have reached.

### Priestley Review

Presiding Officer

We have sought to learn from last year.

As I set out previously to Parliament, I commissioned two key pieces of work.

I asked the OECD to extend the scope of their review of Curriculum for Excellence to include the question of the role exams should play in a modern educational system.

That work will go forward in the coming months but to inform the coming year, I asked Professor Mark Priestley to carry out an independent review looking at events following the cancellation of the examination diet.

Professor Priestley has submitted his report and recommendations and I want to thank him and his team at Stirling University for their excellent work and, in particular, for the pace at which they have completed it.

Presiding Officer

We have also consulted widely.

The SQA set out its initial proposals on modifications to assessments in 2021 and, it is fair to say, they have never seen a more extensive response. Thousands of individual submissions were received. I want to thank everyone who took the time to engage with that work.

I have personally consulted with young people including with pupils in their senior phase who I spent valuable time in discussion with last Thursday.

We have heard the views of parents, of teachers and of our colleges and universities.

And the issues have been discussed with stakeholders across our education system, including those represented on the Education Recovery and Qualifications Contingency Groups.

And, of course, I have consulted medical and scientific experts.

Presiding Officer,

Finally, we have listened to the experts in the design of awarding systems in the SQA, but also from our professional bodies, our local authorities, our schools and Education Scotland.

It is worth pointing out that all of this work comes at a time when the broader picture is one of an education system that has successfully returned to full-time learning.

Despite the virus, attendance remains around 93% for pupils. The additional safety measures and mitigations which we recommended - and teachers and staff have worked so hard to put in place - are working well. This has been confirmed by the Health and Safety Executive who have now engaged with more than 500 schools on the implementation of the Covid-19 guidance.

My thanks go to everyone for their exceptional efforts to re-open schools and deliver face-to-face education safely.

However, despite this progress, the virus remains the same. And, the risk remains that there may be further disruptions for individual pupils, schools, colleges, or more widely across the country during the course of this academic year.

It is in this context that I have found the clear recommendations Professor Priestley makes regarding the approach to awarding in 2021 of great assistance to me in making decisions.

### Decision

Due to the level of disruption already caused by Covid, and due to the likely disruption faced some or all pupils and students this academic year, a full exam diet is simply too big a risk.

It would not be fair.

### N5s

I have therefore asked the Chief Examining Officer to take an alternative approach to National 5 accreditation in 2021 rather than the usual exams. .

The alternative approach to awarding National 5 qualifications will be based on two key recommendations by Professor Mark Priestley. These recommendations are, and I quote:

1. Suspension of the National 5 examinations diet in 2021, with qualifications awarded on the basis of centre estimation based upon validated assessments.
2. The development of a nationally recognised, fully transparent and proportionate system for moderation of centre-based assessment.

So, the alternative approach will be based on teacher judgement, supported by assessment resources, and quality assurance.

This will include, where possible, specifying between 2 and 4 pieces of work per subject that will form the basis of arriving at a final award.

The SQA will today publish broad guidance on evidence gathering and estimation, with a very clear focus on quality rather than quantity of that evidence. That will be followed after the October break by subject specific guidance on the key pieces of work that young people will need to complete.

And, to support the process, the SQA will work with Education Scotland, local authorities, regional improvement collaboratives and others to support a local and national approach to moderation and quality assurance, including the provision of assessment resources.

Obviously, we must seek to maintain standards. Therefore, the SQA will work with schools and colleges during the year on the quality assurance of their pupils' work.

This will include SQA looking at a sample of work within each school and college and feeding back to the teachers and lecturers to ensure standards are maintained. The SQA will build this system of quality assurance in collaboration with the education system, drawing on its existing expertise.

Put simply, an A in Aberdeen has to be the same as an A in Annan or anywhere else.

But, I want to be very clear to Parliament, given the controversies of the last awards process, what will not happen.

First and foremost, awards will not be given – or taken away - on the basis of a statistical model nor on the basis of a school's past performance. There will be no algorithm.

Awards will be based on the progress of our young people and their work. This work and the judgement of the teacher, supported by appropriate quality assurance to maintain standards, will be the evidence on which grades are based. .

### Highers /Advanced Highers

In taking this decision on National 5 exams, we also need to think about Highers and Advanced Highers.

In a standard exam year, the National 5's constitute more than half of all exams taken.

From a public health point of view, not having these exams significantly reduces the risk of the exams as a whole. It means that we can build an exam diet for Highers and Advanced Highers that is as safe as it possibly can be, using all the coronavirus mitigations we have sadly become so familiar with, including physical distancing and enhanced cleaning.

That means that the exams determining the results that most pupils leave schools with, the exams that determine most people's future path into work, college, or university, can go ahead as long as the public health guidance allows it.

It also means that we can use the time in the school year freed up by cancelling the National 5 exams to make up some of the time pupils lost at the end of last year.

As a result, I can confirm that Higher and Advanced Higher exams will begin on 13 May, later than normal and giving pupils back approximately two weeks of the learning time they lost this year. Certification day will remain as 10 August.

This additional time, in conjunction with the course assessment modifications that SQA have made following its consultation, give the greatest chances of these exams being implemented fairly.

### Contingency Plan

Presiding Officer,

While I am taking steps that makes space for Higher and Advanced Higher exams next year, I am acutely aware that there is no way of knowing what circumstances we will face at that point.

To avoid decisions being made in extremis, as quite simply had to be the case this year, a clear contingency plan will continue to be developed for these exams.

This will include key check-points up to the February break to assess public health advice and, in light of that, our plans.

If necessary, we will award Higher and Advanced Higher courses based on teacher professional judgement, supported by SQA quality assurance, taking account of classroom assessment evidence, including prelims where appropriate.

### Next steps/Conclusion

Presiding Officer

In deciding the way forward for this year's exams, there is a reality that we must face.

Coronavirus has not gone away. If anything, it is making a comeback.

Our task is to build a system of awards that can be delivered despite Coronavirus.

I believe the plan we have developed does that.

It has evidence at its heart, it puts a robust system of quality assurance in place and it works with teachers to award on the basis of their professional judgement.

I believe it is fair. I believe it is rigorous. And of greatest importance, it gives us the opportunity to recognise the achievements of young people in Scotland in these challenging times.

**1,750 words**

## Enclosure 12.2: Attachment: SG response to Priestley recommendations

### SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RAPID REVIEW OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS EXPERIENCE 2020

Recommendation	Decision	SG Response
<p>1. Suspension of the 2021 National 5 exam diet, with qualifications awarded on the basis of centre estimation based upon validated assessments.</p>	<p>ACCEPT</p>	<p>Due to the level of disruption already caused and the level of disruption likely to be faced by some or all pupils and students this academic year, the risks of holding a full diet in 2021 are too great.</p> <p>In view of the recommendation, and having consulted widely, including through the Education Recovery Group and with learners, teachers and parents, the Deputy First Minister has decided to cancel National 5 examinations in 2021.</p> <p>On this basis, the Deputy First Minister has asked Scotland's Chief Examining Officer to develop an alternative approach to awarding National 5 qualifications that is based on exam centre estimates, based on teacher/lecturer judgements and supported by assessment resources and quality assurance at national and local level.</p> <p>Higher and Advanced Higher examinations in 2021 will go ahead. They will start on 13 May 2021, slightly later than is normal, therefore, allowing some additional learning time this academic year to make up for some of that lost at the end of 2019-20. Modifications to course assessment will also be made by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) following its consultation in order to maximise learning and teaching time. A clear contingency plan is being developed for Higher and Advanced Higher exams. This will include key check points up to the February break to assess public health advice and, if needed, Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be awarded based on teacher professional</p>

		judgement, taking account of normal assessment evidence, and subject to quality assurance to ensure standards are maintained.
2. The development of a nationally recognised, fully transparent and proportionate system for moderation of centre-based assessment.	ACCEPT	<p>The Scottish Government recognises the key role of the SQA in maintaining the standards of qualifications and that external validation and quality assurance of teacher and lecture evidence is important in ensuring that results are as robust and fair as possible.</p> <p>.</p> <p>The Deputy First Minister has asked the Chief Examining officer to ensure that the alternative approach for the awarding of National 5 qualifications is based on teacher judgement supported by validated assessments. This approach is to include the provision of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear guidance for teachers, lecturers and exams centres on evidence gathering and estimation, with a clear focus on quality rather than quantity of that evidence;</li> <li>• where possible, National 5 subject specific guidance that, includes 2-4 key pieces of work that will inform their final grade;</li> <li>• a support plan developed by the SQA, with Education Scotland, local authorities, regional improvement collaboratives and others to support a local and national approach to moderation and quality assurance, including the provision of assessment resources.</li> </ul> <p>Alongside this, to ensure standards are maintained, SQA will work alongside exam centres during the year on the quality assurance of learners' work. This engagement will take place with all exam centres, with the SQA looking at a sample of work within each school and college and providing specific feedback to ensure standards are maintained.</p>

<p>3. The development of more extensive approaches to collaborative decision making and co-construction by professional stakeholders of assessment practices related to National Qualifications.</p>	<p>ACCEPT</p>	<p>A system-wide, collaborative approach is imperative to the development and delivery of the assessment and moderation approach for 2021. The Curriculum and Assessment Board will also have an important role to play. The Scottish Government has agreed with the OECD to extend the remit of the Curriculum for Excellence review currently underway in order that it can look more explicitly at assessment and qualifications issues, including assessment practices, drawing on best practice globally. This work will include discussions with stakeholders.</p>
<p>4. A commitment to embedding equalities in all aspects of the development of qualifications systems.</p>	<p>ACCEPT</p>	<p>SQA has a commitment and statutory duty to fulfil its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. SQA's own policies including its Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications Policy outline the organisation's commitment to promoting and facilitating access to its qualifications.</p> <p>The Scottish Government and the SQA will work closely with the Children and Young People's Commissioner and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission to further embed best practice in order to best realise principles of equity and equality.</p>
<p>5. The development of more systematic processes for working with and engaging young people, as stakeholders and rights holders in education.</p>	<p>ACCEPT</p>	<p>The Scottish Government recognises the critical place young people have as stakeholders and rights holders in education.</p> <p>A range of work is underway by the Scottish Government to further strengthen the voice of learners in Scotland education policy in 2020/21: learners are being consulted as part of the OECD Review; the Scottish Learner Panel is being extended to run to June 2021, to ensure a broad panel of learners from schools across Scotland can work to influence the discussion by the Education Recovery Group and other key forums; support continues to be provided to Young Ambassadors for Inclusion to ensure that young people with</p>

		additional support needs can help to inform and comment on policy; and support is being provided to Young Scot to produce advice and support materials to address young people's concerns about their mental health and, through their partnership with SQA, to provide information on qualifications and assessment.
6. The development of a clear communications strategy, co-constructed with stakeholders, to ensure that the extraordinary arrangements for 2021 are as fully as possible understood by all parties.	ACCEPT	The Scottish Government is committed to making the arrangements for the assessment of national qualifications in 2020-21 as clear as possible for all stakeholders. The Scottish Government will work with the SQA to communicate this effectively to the public and the education system. This approach will look to provide as much certainty as possible, but will also be responsive to changing circumstances.
7. A review of qualification appeals systems, including consideration of the rights and roles of young people, in the context of the incorporation of the UNCRC into Scottish law.	ACCEPT	The Scottish Government fully recognises that young people are rights holders and key stakeholders with the education system. We will ask the SQA to review the appeals system for National Qualifications, working closely with education partners, including young people, to ensure it best meets the needs of young people in line with the principles of the UNCRC.
8. The commissioning of independent research into the development and application of the 2020 ACM, involving full access to anonymised attainment data and the statistical algorithms used to moderate grades.	Consider as a future project as part of our research strategy in education	The Scottish Government notes this recommendation but does not consider this to be a priority for our improvement activity at this stage given that there is no intention to have a similar model in support of awarding in 2020-21. The recommendation will be considered by the team in Scottish Government that assesses a range of potential projects for inclusion in our research in education strategy. This will be done in consultation with SQA.

<p>9. The development by SQA and partners of digital materials and systems for producing, assessing and moderating assessment evidence, to ensure that operational processes for gathering candidate evidence for appeals is less reliant on paper-based systems.</p>	<p>ACCEPT</p>	<p>SQA will continue its work, funded by the Scottish Government, on developing digitising assessment evidence in close consultation with centres. Progress has already been made in this area in the form of digital marking.</p>
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**Enclosure 13: Email: 2021 Qualifications - Letter from Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, SQA**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk> **On Behalf Of** Fiona Robertson  
**Sent:** 07 October 2020 15:00  
**To:** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills  
<DFMCSE@gov.scot>  
**Cc:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>  
**Subject:** 2021 Qualifications - Letter from Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, SQA

Dear Deputy First Minister

In response to your letter of 6 October, please find attached letter from Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, SQA.

Kind regards,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]  
Scottish Qualifications Authority

w: <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

## **Enclosure 13.1: Attachment: Letter**

7 October 2020

John Swinney MSP  
Deputy First Minister and  
Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

By email: DFMCE@gov.scot

Dear Deputy First Minister

Thank you for your letter of 6 October. I can confirm that we have discussed these issues in recent days and your letter reflects those discussions.

It is your decision to cancel National 5 exams this year. As you request, and in close consultation and collaboration with the education system, SQA will develop alternative certification arrangements. Your letter sets out your broad expectations on how that will be done and I can confirm that we will take work forward to do so. Broad guidance on evidence gathering and estimation will be published today, with subject specific guidance to follow. We will also work to provide assessment resources to schools and colleges.

Your letter also sets out that the diet for Higher and Advanced Higher should proceed. We will work on that basis, alongside the further development of contingency arrangements with stakeholders should they be needed. The diet will commence on 13 May, to allow for further learning and teaching time, and certification day will remain as 10 August. Our modifications to assessment for 2021, following extensive consultation, and also published today, should also help relieve pressure on the system this year.

We have discussed the need to ensure that standards are maintained in 2021, in fairness to learners across Scotland. To achieve this, there is an important role for everyone across the education system, through a commitment to quality assurance, guidance and support. The role of SQA is critical, and we will work on the support plan you identify, but this cannot be achieved by the actions of SQA alone. I will provide an update to you on this work as soon as possible. We will also continue to engage with officials on our budgetary position in 2020/21 and 2021/22.

I am very grateful to your officials for sharing an advance copy of Professor Priestley's Review and the Scottish Government's initial response to it. Following consultation with the SQA Board of Management, I will provide a more detailed response to the Scottish Government in the coming days.

To conclude, these have been very challenging times for SQA. We worked incredibly hard to deliver on your commission for 2020, and in truly exceptional circumstances, but it led to a Ministerial direction. I will keep you closely informed on our progress during the course of the year, to ensure SQA continues to fulfil its statutory functions, and with the commitment and agreement of partners and the support of learners.

Above all, as Chief Examining Officer, I want to ensure arrangements for this year deliver for learners across Scotland and maintain the integrity and credibility of qualifications in Scotland.

Yours sincerely

Fiona Robertson  
Chief Executive

**Enclosure 14: Email: SQA statement on 2021 Qualifications - 07 October 2020**

**From:** [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@sqa.org.uk>  
**Sent:** 07 October 2020 16:20  
**To:** Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>  
**Cc:** Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>  
**Subject:** SQA statement on 2021 Qualifications - 07 October 2020

Hello

We have published a statement and a number of support documents following the DFM's Parliamentary statement – <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/95281.html>

This will also go out via our social media channels.

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]