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Enclosure 01 – Email: In Confidence - BOCSH Proposals on Qualifications

From: Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>
Sent: 31 August 2020 14:36
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>
Subject: In Confidence - BOCSH Proposals on Qualifications
Importance: High

In Confidence

Deputy First Minister

Following our discussion on Sunday 30 August, you asked me to set out some brief thoughts on the proposals from the BOCSH Group of headteachers about modifications to assessment for 20/21.

I have not focussed on their assessment of the consultation the SQA has published, rather, I focus on the broader, pan-subject approaches suggested for 20/21 at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

General observations

We are currently working through modifications to assessment for 2021 to relieve pressure on learning and teaching for 2021. This is on the basis that the Exam Diet may take place and central planning for a Diet continues.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

There remains no certainty about Diet 2021, but we do need to have a developed contingency relating to the possibility of there being no Diet, either in full or in part – or where considerable numbers of young people are unable to undertake exams.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

National 5

BOCSH suggest the removal of National 5 exams, to be replaced by teachers' predicted grades and internal assessment.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

Higher

BOCSH agree that the diet should remain in place but at a later date. We would agree that timetabling could be adjusted to later in the absence of National 5 exams.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

BOCSH advocate the removal of examinations for practical subjects. [Redacted 29(1)(a)]

Advanced Higher/Level 7

BOCSH suggest we remove the final exam, increasing the weighting of the dissertation and introducing assessment windows throughout the session for moderated graded assessments to take place and contribute to the final award.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

Conclusion

BOCSH has long advocated for the reduction in the reliance of summative, high stakes assessment. This submission continues to promote that view and calls for boldness in decision making.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

I hope these brief initial thoughts are helpful to you. I am, of course, happy to discuss further.

Fiona

Fiona Robertson
Chief Executive
Scottish Qualifications Authority

t: 0345 213 5000 w: <http://www.sqa.org.uk>
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, GLASGOW G2 8DQ | 24 Wester Shawfair, Lowden, Dalkeith,
Midlothian EH22 1FD

Enclosure 02 – Email: RE: 2021 Qualifications

From: Fiona Robertson <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>
Sent: 08 September 2020 20:43
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: 2021 Qualifications

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

As requested, please see attached advice for the Deputy First Minister.

I hope this is helpful and happy to discuss further, of course.

Fiona

Fiona Robertson
Chief Executive
Scottish Qualifications Authority

t: 0345 213 5000 **w:** <http://www.sqa.org.uk>
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, GLASGOW G2 8DQ | 24 Wester Shawfair,
Lowden, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1FD

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot **On Behalf Of** DFMCSSE@gov.scot
Sent: 06 September 2020 11:37
To: Fiona Robertson
Cc: DFMCSSE@gov.scot
Subject: 2021 Qualifications

Good morning Fiona

As you know, the Deputy First Minister is considering contingencies and options in relation to the assessment of national qualifications in 2020/21. One option is to not hold an examination diet next year and instead use an alternative verification model. Following his discussions with you, and to assist in his consideration of this option, he would welcome your advice as the Chief Examining Officer on what assurances you would be able to provide in relation to the deliverability of such an approach. He would also like an outline of what an alternative model might look like and has commented that this would need to be based firmly on individual learners' work and evidence of their progress and achievement during the year.

I would be grateful if you could provide this advice for the Deputy First Minister by close on Tuesday 8 September.

Many thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | Tel: 0131 244 [Redacted s38(1)(b)]/07[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: DFMCS@gov.scot

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Enclosure 02.1 – Attachment: Word document

NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2021

Purpose

To provide initial advice to Scottish Ministers on alternative certification arrangements which could be in place following an early decision to cancel the exam diet in 2021.

Current context

SQA is currently concluding work on modifications to assessment for 2021 to relieve pressure on learning and teaching for 2021. This is on the basis that the central planning assumption, as outlined in the Strategic Framework for Re-opening Schools published in May, is for an exam diet to be held next year.

The principles that guided this work were:

- Making adjustments for subjects constrained by current public health advice;
- Increasing learning and teaching opportunities; and
- A more flexible approach to assessment for learners, whilst retaining the validity and credibility of qualifications.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

We are confident that we have listened to feedback and modifications will assist learning and teaching. However, schools and colleges remain concerned about the complexities of this academic year, with increased pupil and teacher absences and learning and teaching time already constrained. There are calls to make early decisions on the exam diet to reduce pressure on learners and teachers. Clearly, we need to balance these calls with a need to ensure that high quality learning and teaching continues, with depth and breadth, including through e-learning and blended learning approaches, and with young people being able to progress through the Senior Phase and beyond.

As things stand, there remains no certainty about Diet 2021 and Scotland needs to have a developed contingency relating to the possibility of there being no exam diet, either in full or in part – or where considerable numbers of young people are unable to undertake exams next spring.

Scottish Ministers will decide on whether there should be an exam diet in 2021 and it is for Ministers to commission SQA to develop an alternative certification approach. [Redacted 29(1)(a)]

An alternative certification model for 2021

There is increasing acknowledgement in the system that we can neither adopt a purely statistical approach to moderation in any alternative certification model nor simply accept teacher/lecturer estimates. The role of quality assurance and moderation, where necessary, and how that is done, is key if we consider the maintenance of standards over time, and across centres, to be important. As the national awarding body for Scotland, SQA considers standards to be central to the ongoing credibility of our qualifications system and in fairness to learners, whatever school or college they attend.

Mark Priestley is also looking at approaches to 2021 in the absence of exams as part of his review and it would be important to consider his recommendations in agreeing a final approach for 2021.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

SQA has an established history of undertaking large scale external quality assurance of internally assessed qualifications. This is undertaken by SQA appointees who are teachers or lecturers working in schools and colleges across Scotland. Systems and models of quality assurance are widely used across sectors - the most mature being the college sector which delivers the full depth and breadth of SQA's qualifications, including HNC/Ds.

Except for schools, SQA conducts systems verification - quality assurance of a centre's data management systems and processes, their appeals, malpractice and complaints processes, internal quality assurance systems and so on - of all colleges, employers and training providers.

Following the decision to remove units from National Qualifications, SQA has continued to quality assure National 2 – 4, freestanding units at SCQF levels 5, 6 and 7 and other qualifications delivered in centres, including schools, such as National Progression Awards and Skills for Work.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

SQA Support

SQA is currently working on a suite of support material to assist with certification this year and further work could also be undertaken to support a model of quality assured alternative certification.

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

Issues and risks

Before a final decision is taken, there are number of important issues to consider:

[Redacted 29(1)(a)]

I hope this is helpful and I am happy to discuss further.

Fiona Robertson
Chief Executive/Chief Examining Officer
Scottish Qualifications Authority
8 September 2020

Enclosure 03 – Email: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot > **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 10 September 2020 15:42
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

[Redacted s38(1)(b)],

Apologies, could you please pass on these dial-in details instead? Just avoids confusion with the different dial in numbers:

Dial in number

[Redacted s30(c)]

Guest Passcode for all

[Redacted s30(c)]

Many thanks,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | Tel: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: DFMCSE@gov.scot

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot > **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 10 September 2020 15:40
To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)],

That's great, thanks very much for confirming. I will set up the calendar invite as advised below. Our office doesn't include non-SG accounts in our calendar invites, so would you please be able to pass on the below dial in details to Professor Priestley, Andrea Priestley and Maria Shapira?

Dial in number for Ministers, Private Office Staff and Externals

[Redacted s30(c)]

Dial in number for Scottish Government Officials

[Redacted s30(c)]

Guest Passcode for all

[Redacted s30(c)]

I would also be most grateful if we could please have some briefing for this meeting by COP Monday. Let me know if there are any questions or issues with this request.

Many thanks,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | Tel: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: DFMCSSE@gov.scot

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

Sent: 10 September 2020 13:16

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

With apologies for the delay, Professor Priestley can do this time.

The invites would be for

Mark Priestley - [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@stir.ac.uk

Andrea Priestley - [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@stir.ac.uk

Marina Shapira - [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@stir.ac.uk

SG officials will be

[Redacte , Malcolm and [Redact

If Gayle Gorman could also be invited

Please shout if there are any issues.

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot

Sent: 07 September 2020 17:36

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

Thanks [Redacted s38(1)(b)], I'll get that confirmed with Professor Priestley and let you know.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 07 September 2020 17:08

To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

Subject: RE: Priestley review - initial findings session

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)],

Thanks for sending this up – could we please do 15:00-16:00 on the 15th? I can send dial in details to pass to Professor Priestley once this time has been confirmed.

Many thanks,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP | Deputy First Minister of Scotland and Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills | Scottish Government | St Andrew's House | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG | Tel: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: DFMCSSE@gov.scot

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

Sent: 07 September 2020 14:52

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>

Subject: Priestley review - initial findings session

Hi

Following previous discussions with the DFM, could we look to secure an hour slot on 15 September for Professor Priestley to talk the DFM through the initial findings of the review in advance of working towards publication of the report on 30 September please?

Happy to discuss.

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic - Learning Directorate

Scottish Government

(0131 24) x. [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

email: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Enclosure 04 – Email: FW: Priestley Review

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot > **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 15 September 2020 12:08
To: Swinney J (John) <John.Swinney@gov.scot>
Cc: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: FW: Priestley Review

DFM,
For information ahead of your meeting at 3PM.
Thanks
[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: Pentland MK (Malcolm)
Sent: 15 September 2020 10:59
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Cc: Director of Learning ; Gorman G (Gayle) ; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot ; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot ; McAllister C (Colin)
Subject: Priestley Review

PS/DFM

DFM has a call scheduled for 3pm today to hear from Professor Priestley and his team on initial findings from their Review of the NQs experience in 2020. A confidential verbal update will be provided and Mark has indicated that the following will be covered:

1. Overview of findings (Prof Mark Priestley)
2. Statistical model (Dr Marina Shapira)
3. Experience and Perspectives of Young People (Dr Andrea Priestley)
4. Emerging Recommendations (Prof Mark Priestley)

Thanks

Malcolm

Malcolm Pentland | Deputy Director
Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Division | email: malcolm.pentland@gov.scot | tel:[Redacted]

Learning Directorate | Area 2B North | Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ
Buidheann-Stiùiridh an Ionnachaidh | Raon 2B Tuath | Cidhe Bhictòria | Dùn Èideann | EH6 6QQ

Enclosure 05 – SCANCE Contribution for 22 September Meeting – SQA awarding 2021

SCANCE Contribution for 22 September Meeting – SQA awarding 2021

[Redacted – not in scope]

Speaking Note

[Redacted s29(1)(b)]

Enclosure 06 – Email: Note from DFM on Assessment of SQA National Qualifications In 2020-21

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot > **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 05 October 2020 09:19
To: First Minister <firstminister@gov.scot>
Cc: DG Education, Communities & Justice <DGECJ@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Johnston P (Paul) <Paul.Johnston@gov.scot>; SG LD School Education <SGLDSE@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Armstrong A (Alan) <Alan.Armstrong@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Pooley L (Linda) Dr <Linda.Pooley@gov.scot>; Macdonald R (Roddy) <Roddy.Macdonald@gov.scot>; Wilson M (Mick) <Mick.Wilson@gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anson@gov.scot>; Drought A (Andrew) <Andrew.Drought@gov.scot>; Morrison E (Elizabeth) (Education Scotland) <Elizabeth.Morrison2@gov.scot>; Peskett K (Katherine) <Katherine.Peskett@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>
Subject: Note from DFM on Assessment of SQA National Qualifications In 2020-21

FMPO,

Please find attached a note for the attention of the First Minister from the Deputy First Minister on SQA National Qualifications In 2020-21.

Kind regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

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

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Enclosure 06.1 – Attachment: Word document

From: Deputy First Minster

5 October 2020

First Minister

ASSESSMENT OF SQA NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS IN 2020-21

[Redacted s29(1)(b)]

JS

Enclosure 07 – 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)]

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

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Mob: 07[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Email: DFMCSE@gov.scot

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Enclosure 07.1 – Attachment: PDF

Leas Phriomh Mhiniestar agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Foghlam agus Sgilean
Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for
Education and Skills

John Swinney BPA/MSP
F/T: 0300 244 4000
E: dfmcse@gov.scot



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Fiona Robertson
Chief Examining Officer
Scottish Qualifications Authority

By email: 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.

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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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:

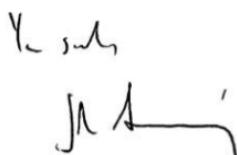
- clear guidance for teachers, lecturers and exams centres on evidence gathering and estimation, with a clear focus on quality rather than quantity of that evidence;
- clear National 5 subject specific guidance that, where possible, includes absolute clarity on 2-4 key pieces of work that young people 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

Tha Ministearan na h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus an Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

Scottish Ministers, special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

Taigh Naomh Anndrais, Rathad Regent, Dùn Èideann EH1
3DG
St Andrew's House, Regent Road, Edinburgh EH1 3DG
www.gov.scot



Enclosure 08 – 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 08.1 – Attachment: PDF



7 October 2020

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

By email: DFMCSE@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.

The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8DQ
An Togalach Optima, 58 Sràid MhicDhonnachaidh, Glaschu, G2 8DQ

T: 0345 279 1000 F: 0345 213 5000
E: customer@sqa.org.uk W: www.sqa.org.uk

Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, EH22 1FD
Lowden, 24 Shawfair an Iar, Dal Ché, EH22 1FD

Chairman: David Middleton CBE
Chief Executive: Fiona Robertson

07 October 2020

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 09 – Email: RE: Ministerial Statement - Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 07 October 2020 13:48
To: Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans <MinisterPBV@gov.scot>
Cc: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Johnston P (Paul) <Paul.Johnston@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; McKay D (Denise) <Denise.McKay@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; First Minister <firstminister@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Ministerial Statement - Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Apologies, but can you use this version please? Just correcting a small typo.

Kind Regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills | The Scottish Government | Web: www.gov.scot |

📞 0300 24 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Mobile: 0044 (0)7[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Email: DFMCSE@gov.scot | [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot

5N.07 St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG

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Scottish Ministers, Special advisers and the Permanent Secretary are covered by the terms of the Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016. See www.lobbying.scot

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 07 October 2020 13:11
To: Minister for Parliamentary Business and Veterans
Cc: Pentland MK (Malcolm) ; Gorman G (Gayle) ; McAllister C (Colin) ; Director of Learning ; Johnston P (Paul) ; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot ; McKay D (Denise) ; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot ; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot ; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills ; First Minister
Subject: Ministerial Statement - Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21

Good afternoon

Please find attached a copy of DFM's statement – FM has cleared.

I note that DFM's statement will now be from **16:00 - 16:30**.

Kind Regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills |

The Scottish Government | Web: www.gov.scot |

📞 0300 24 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Mobile: 0044 (0)7[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Email: DFMCSE@gov.scot |

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From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot > **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

Sent: 06 October 2020 15:48

To: First Minister <firstminister@gov.scot>

Cc: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

<DFMCSE@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Johnston P (Paul) <Paul.Johnston@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot; McKay D (Denise) <Denise.McKay@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>

Subject: FOR CLEARANCE: Ministerial Statement - Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21

FMPO

Please see attached draft of DFM's Statement on 'Assessment of SQA National Qualifications in 2020-21'. DFM is due to deliver this in the Chamber tomorrow at 16:00 – I'd be grateful if you could share this with the First Minister for clearance if possible.

Kind Regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills |

The Scottish Government | Web: www.gov.scot |

📞 0300 24 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Mobile: 0044 (0)7[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | Email: DFMCSE@gov.scot |

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot

5N.07 St Andrew's House | Regent Road | Edinburgh | EH1 3DG

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Enclosure 09.1 – Attachment: Word document

**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