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Enclosure 1 - 127416

Tue 15/12/2020 20:22

[Redact s38(1)(b)]@glow.sch.uk

Workload surrounding arrangements for SQA National Qualifications

First Minister firstminister@gov.scotAO – [Redact s38(1)(b)]

To whom it may concern,

RE: Workload surrounding preparation, marking and moderation of assessments for SQA National Physics qualifications.

I am writing to raise my concerns surrounding the amount of work that is realistically required in order to ensure the grades that we predict are supported by evidence acceptable to SQA. With other members of my department, I have spent the last few days reviewing the document “Physics: Guidance on gathering evidence and providing estimates,” found on the SQA Understanding Standards website: <https://www.understandingstandards.org.uk/Subjects/Physics/AdditionalGuidance> While this document does clearly state (page 8)

“There is no requirement, or obligation, on centres to construct new assessments on which to base estimates.”

The fact the next sentence begins with the word ‘however’, gives clear indication of the level of work that SQA expects us to put into the preparation of these assessments.

The document goes on to say that any existing papers must be conducted to the same standard as the final SQA exam would usual be. When preparing final exam papers, SQA requires a significant amount of time to ensure the correct split between ‘A’ grade questions and ‘C’ grade questions, between each topic covered in the course, and between the assessed skills. This workload has now landed squarely on the shoulders of the teachers. Please also note:

- As of this date, SQA have not published their ‘sample’ National 5 assessment, which should be the basis of our assessments.
- SQA’s own timeline expects centres to be ready to start submitting evidence in approximately one month (at the end of January).

This leaves us with a task that will require a massive amount of time. This is a task which would be difficult to complete without the approaching Christmas break. Our workload now includes ensuring any existing assessments are to the standards set out in this new document (released within the last month), which includes information on standards that SQA have not previously shared.

As a result of these changes, teachers are now required to complete the following additional tasks:

- Review any existing assessments to ensure compliance with current SQA standards. Most assessments will fall below the standard required by the SQA which will require them to be rewritten.
- Prepare additional assessment materials to current SQA standards.
 - o Papers need to contain 30% ‘A’ grade marks and 70% ‘C’ grade marks.
 - o Papers must have the correct number of marks from each of the assessed topics.

o Papers must be within the correct range of marks on each of the 10 assessed skills (including 3 knowledge and understanding skills and 7 scientific enquiry type skills.

o SQA have suggested that skills areas normally assessed in the assignment should be included in any paper but that these “must not significantly change the structure or format that candidates may be expecting, based on practice using past papers.”

- Review how closely each question paper mirrors the standards set out and adjust the grade boundaries up or down accordingly.

o Where a paper is split over two or more periods, the grade boundary must be raised. SQA have suggested this could be as much 7% in their example which puts an ‘A’ grade at 77% and a ‘C’ grade at 57%. This is nearly unheard of in SQA Physics National qualifications.

o This includes where a prelim covering only part of the course is sat initially with a mop up assessment covering the rest of the course is sat at a later date. Following marking of these assessments, SQA is requiring that we analyse each candidate’s performance in each ‘A’ grade mark and each ‘C’ grade mark to ensure they were of a suitable standard. The grade boundaries are then to be adjusted as appropriate. To the best of my knowledge, this is a task that is normally completed by a team of statisticians employed by SQA.

Given exams have been cancelled due to lost time caused by the current crisis, dropping this extra workload, pressure and worry at the feet of teachers, who are already behind schedule because time has been lost due to the current crisis, seems to be a grave mistake at best. Furthermore, this added pressure is likely to have a detrimental effect on our students learning and their final qualification in one of the following ways:

- teacher time (which is already short) will be diverted to making sure the assessment material is robust, possibly at the cost of students not completing the course. This would affect the range topics they can be assessed on and, where there is insufficient spread from the whole course, SQA will insist the grade boundaries are raised;

- or teachers will concentrate on covering the whole of the course, instead sacrificing time that would be used to ensure the standard of each assessment is to SQA’s satisfaction. This will likely result in the grade boundaries being raised resulting in pupils dropping a grade (or more).

Now that the Higher and Advanced Higher exams have been cancelled, this increase in workload has now been tripled. Given the current situation, I can only see outcomes from this years qualifications which will leave our students at a huge disadvantage compared to other years. Further, SQA seem to be positioning themselves in such a way that they lay any blame for this disadvantage on teachers. Finally, it is important to note that no time has been allowed in order to tackle this huge preparatory workload.

In order to protect our students and all our teachers, urgent action is required to address the issues included above.

Yours faithfully

[Redact s38(1)(b)]Teacher of Physics

Enclosure 2 - 127222

-----Original Message-----

From: [Redact s38(1)(b)] Sent: 14 December 2020 19:07

To: Swinney J (John), MSP

Subject: Cancellation of exams 2021

Mr. Swinney,

I write to express my disappointment regarding your decision to cancel the SCE exam diet in 2021.

I worked in Education all my professional career, for the final twelve years as Headteacher of [Redact s38(1)(b)] High school.

You emphasize 'fairness' as a driving force, for this decision, you should be aware that equalizing opportunities does not mean treating everyone the same, but in giving each individual the support they need.

You must be well aware that many disadvantaged young people had no access to online support.

I understand that many thousands of laptops were purchased during the first lockdown but not issued.

What would have been fairer, and equalized opportunity, would have been extra tuition, reduced class sizes and a focus on 'catch up' for those who had missed out on teaching.

Cancelling exams is as equally damaging for those who have lost no teaching time as for those who have.

Scotland's educational reputation has already suffered significant diminution during the SNP regime and your decision will only lead to further reputational damage.

I look forward to your response.

[Redact s38(1)(b)] Sent from my iPad

Enclosure 3 – 124625

From: [Redact s38(1)(b)]@glow. [Redact s38(1)(b)].sch.uk>
Sent: 09 December 2020 14:04
To: Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>
Subject: Cancellation of exams 2021

CAUTION: This e-mail originated from outside of The Scottish Parliament. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Mr Swinney

At the moment it looks like the SQA only have plans to publish last year's exam papers and we as teachers are being expected to produce and moderate other pieces of work to maintain the standards set by SQA.

I wondered if it would be possible to release this year's exam papers (and marking schemes) to help alleviate the workload in relation to this enormous task.

It used to be the case that SQA had a contingency paper for each exam which means that if they do not release another paper, they have 2 unused papers for every exam. I therefore do not think that this is an unreasonable request. It will be a big enough job ensuring that the internal assessments are marked accurately and standardised across schools and authorities, without having to make them up ourselves whilst some perfectly good instruments of assessment are already made up to the required standard.

I look forward to hearing from you or your representative on this matter.

Yours sincerely
[Redact s38(1)(b)] (in a personal capacity)

Faculty Head of Technology
[Redact s38(1)(b)]High School

Tel: [Redact s38(1)(b)]

Enclosure 4 - 124224

From: [Redact s38(1)(b)]@yahoo.co.uk>
Sent: 09 December 2020 08:39
To: Public Engagement Unit <CorrespondenceUnit@gov.scot>
Subject: Re: Your recent correspondence with Scottish Government and partner agencies - 202000099181

FAO [Redact s38(1)(b)]
Copy: Mr John Swinney

Sir,

This is now the second (stock?) reply which, like the first, simply does not address the question I asked.

My question is not about any “frustration and disappointment” at grades awarded in lieu of a 2020 exam diet, and is certainly not about “hopes and expectations not being met”. Also, it would appear, my question will not be covered by the review to be led by Professor Mark Priestly since I am certainly not concerned with “events leading to the awarding of (2020) SQA grades” .

My question, which I hope will now be given due and specific attention, is:

Given the wide variation between the global picture of teacher grade assessments in 2020, and grades patterns achieved in previous years with year end exams, should the use of year end exams now be questioned?

Having spent almost my entire working life in education I am only too aware of the value of longitudinal ongoing assessment versus year end exams. I look forward to your eventual specific response.

Regards

[Redact s38(1)(b)]

Enclosure 5 – 124151

From: [Redact s38(1)(b)]@[Redact s38(1)(b)].gov.uk>
Sent: 08 December 2020 08:48
To: Swinney J (John), MSP <John.Swinney.msp@parliament.scot>
Subject: Cancellation of Higher and AH exams

Dear Mr Swinney

I am principal Teacher of Social Subjects in a large Secondary School in [Redact s38(1)(b)] and I am strongly against the exams being cancelled in 2021 for the following reasons;

1. This cohort of pupils have not experienced any external test of their learning, The first time they will experience the this type of stress will be at university, college or in the work place and this will have a long term effect on their progress and mental health. They will feel disadvantages from their competitors who came before or after who have attained externally verified credible grades. Their qualifications will always be viewed with caution.
2. There are always inequities to learning during the exam year. For example during the winter of 2010-11 there was snow for prolonged period of time and many schools remained closed for weeks – exams were not cancelled then, Schools in my area often have to operate exam classes without specialist teachers when teachers leave we have problems filling vacancies, exams are not cancelled for all pupils due to this.
3. For the number of pupils who have been affected extra support should be given to them so that they have the opportunity to fill the gaps in their learning. Incidentally if they have had so many absences that they are unable to sit a much reduced assessment how are teachers able to give them an accurate estimate grade. When these are compared across the country, surely these pupils are at a huge advantage compared to all the rest.
4. Assessments have already been adjusted to accommodate the potential disruption of attendance by around 30%. We are lucky in that we have had little disruption so far and our attendance has been near enough 100%. We are therefore on course to finish teaching the courses well before the Easter holidays, probably around the end of February. What are we supposed to do with the pupils then? Do we continue to assess them all until they all achieve A's. Do we add in the bits of the courses missed out so that they have a larger content to be assessed on – how is this fair. What will happen during exam leave? Potentially all pupils will be in school continuously with no courses to learn.
5. The assessment burden has been taken off the SQA and put directly on teachers with no time for marking, planning or moderation. This caused considerable stress amongst teachers who agonised over each individual pupil during the last exam period.
6. If exams are cancelled due to the complex nature of making them covid safe in a school. This would not be that difficult to manage if they were prioritised over everything else. For example, during a big exam say Maths or English all other year groups could learn at home that day and the exam pupils could be distributed throughout classrooms and supervised by teachers.

7. Calculate how many pupils this will affect directly. I am aware that it will affect the most deprived areas the most, but we need to be careful that we are not affecting all our young people's potential to a successful life. These young people are our future and we are relying on them to pay our pensions.

Yours Sincerely

[Redact s38(1)(b)]

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Enclosure 6 – 124148

From: [Redact s38(1)(b)]@outlook.com>
Sent: 08 December 2020 16:11
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
<DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Subject: FAO John swinney - Higher exams

Dear Mr swinney,

I am not one to contact any form of politician usually because I don't see any worth in it. But I am so passionate about my career and the pupils in my care that I cannot let this pass.

The recent pressure to cancel the exams is downright ridiculous, you should not be influenced by your fellow politicians but those that are on the front line - the teachers. The cancellation of national 5 exams have already caused more stress than I have ever see an exam result in, it has even made me question whether to go to work because of the pressures that have been thrust upon me.

Over my time teaching I have seen pupils excel in the final exam but their continual assessment has been poor in comparison, this is because the finished product is never ready overnight so they know where the finish line is so can take it one step at a time.

The argument based on fairness can be looked at from both sides, if the exams are to be cancelled then not every school uses the same assessments and prelims so there could be an unfair advantage in some schools - and there is not the opportunity for a like for like comparison.

Where as if the exams were to remain in place, with a suitable appeal process, those that are deemed to be at a disadvantage due to isolations can have a fall back.

However, I don't agree that isolations result in a major disadvantage, there would be more of a disadvantage to those that missed course assessments that were planned for evidence if exams were to be cancelled. A pupil is more likely to catch up on two weeks of missed work by the exam diet in May rather than it be tested a week after returning from isolation.

At the end of the day, teachers and pupils know what is best for them - not the unions or politicians or the sqa. So if you want direct answers from those that you would affect most by the decision to cancel exams, then ask the teachers and pupils because I'm sure many, myself included, would be able to talk if it meant the pupils in our care had the best possible chance at succeeding!

I don't expect you to take the time to reply, but please please think about the decisions you are making and how will it affect those at the heart.

Yours sincerely,
[Redact s38(1)(b)]
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