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No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Clause
01	Email: Update on NQ diet 2021	02 October 2020 17:00	Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -
02	SQA Awards 2021: Deputy First Minister's speech	07 October 2020	Information accessible	25(1)
03	National Qualifications experience 2020 – rapid review: SG response	07 October 2020	Information accessible	25(1)
04	Extract from briefing for Deputy First Minister for Parliamentary statement	07 October 2020 11:16	-	-
05	Email: RE: FOR CLEARANCE: SQA award news release	07 October 2020 14:49	Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -
06	Email: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020	16 November 2020 17:25	Personal information	38(1)(b)
06.1	Attachment: Word document		Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -
07	Email: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020	16 November 2020 19:20	Information not in scope	-
07.1	Attachment: Word document		Information not in scope	-
08	Email: RE: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020	17 November 2020 10:57	Information not in scope	-
09	Email: Qualifications Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 November 2020 v3	17 November 2020 21:43	-	-
09.1	Attachment: Word document		Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -
10	Email: 2021 HIGHER AND ADVANCED HIGHER EXAM DIET – ONGOING REVIEW OF DECISION	17 November 2020 22:09	Personal information	38(1)(b)
10.1	Attachment: Word document		Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -

11	Email: RE: DFM Session with SLS - 18 November - Readout	23 November 2020 13:41	Personal information Information not in scope	38(1)(b) -
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Enclosure 01 – Email: Update on NQ diet 2021

From: Logan G (Graeme) <Graeme.Logan@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Director of Learning

Sent: 02 October 2020 17:00

To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education, Communities & Justice <DGECJ@gov.scot>; Johnston P (Paul) <Paul.Johnston@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Communications DFM & Education <CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Drought A (Andrew) <Andrew.Drought@gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anon@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>

Subject: Update on NQ diet 2021

DFM

A further meeting took place this afternoon with Larry Flanagan (EIS), Jim Thewliss (SLS), Tony McDaid and Steven Quinn (ADES), Gayle Gorman (ES) Fiona Robertson, Gill Stewart and Jean Blair (SQA). We represented the Scottish Government.

[Redacted – not in scope]

In terms of the contingency arrangements for higher and advanced higher, [Redacted – not in scope]. All agree that a backstop date needs to be set for a 'go/no go' decision on the higher and advanced higher diet. SQA suggest February half-term at the latest.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Graeme Logan and Malcolm Pentland
Learning Directorate
2 October 2020

Enclosure 02 – SQA Awards: Deputy First Minister’s speech

[Redacted s25(1) – <https://www.gov.scot/publications/deputy-first-ministers-speech-sqa-awards-2021/>]

Enclosure 03 - National Qualifications experience 2020 – rapid review: SG response

[Redacted s25(1) – <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-of-national-qualifications-experience-2020-our-response/>]

Enclosure 04 – Extract from briefing for Deputy First Minister for Parliamentary statement

[Redacted – not in scope]

Whilst taking these steps, there is no way of knowing what circumstances we will face in the spring of 2021 when pupils would normally be sitting exams.

- To avoid decisions being made in extremis, as quite simply had to be the case this year, a clear contingency plan is being developed for these exams.
- This includes key check-points up to the February break to assess public health advice and, in light of that, the assessment approach to be used for National 5 courses.
- If necessary, Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be awarded based on teacher professional judgement, supported by SQA quality assurance, taking account of classroom assessment evidence, including prelims where appropriate.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Enclosure 05 – Email: RE: FOR CLEARANCE: SQA award news release

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 07 October 2020 14:49
To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Communications DFM & Education <CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@educationscotland.gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education, Communities & Justice <DGECJ@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: FOR CLEARANCE: SQA award news release

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

DFM has noted and is content to clear.

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>
Sent: 07 October 2020 14:14
To: Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <DFMCSE@gov.scot>
Cc: [redacted s38 (1)(b)] >; Communications DFM & Education <CommunicationsDFM&Education@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@educationscotland.gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education, Communities & Justice <DGECJ@gov.scot>
Subject: FOR CLEARANCE: SQA award news release

PO

Please find a draft news release on the exams diet for Mr Swinney's comments/clearance please, this has been cleared with policy and spads. I am aware DFM has asked for confirmation on the point highlighted and officials will get back shortly.

I also attach the tweets and slides for @scotgovedu which follow the wording in the release.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Many thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

SQA awards 2021

Plans for Highers to go ahead; National 5 exams replaced.

Plans have been announced for Higher and Advanced Higher exams to go ahead in 2021, while National 5 exams will be replaced by a system where grades are awarded based on coursework and teacher judgement.

It means the volume of exams that will take place will be reduced by half, lowering public health risks and allowing plans for Higher and Advanced Highers to proceed.

In a statement to Parliament, Deputy First Minister John Swinney said the ongoing uncertainty caused by the pandemic, combined with the fact that pupils have already lost significant study time as a result of the lockdown last academic year, meant that the normal exam plans were simply not possible.

Replacing the National 5 exams makes space in the timetable to push the Higher and Advanced Higher exams back until May, making up some of the lost learning time. These exams will now begin on 13 May, around two weeks later than usual.

A clear contingency plan will, however, be put in place in case it proves impossible for Higher and Advanced Higher exams to go ahead due to public health advice.

National 5 awards will generally be based on two to four pieces of work per subject that will be formally graded by teachers. The SQA will publish guidance for teachers on evidence gathering and estimation, and subject-specific guidance on the key pieces of work that young people will need to complete. The SQA will also work with schools and colleges throughout the year to quality assure the assessment of learners' work.

Replacing National 5 exams was recommended by Professor Mark Priestley in his independent review into the events following the cancellation of exams in 2020. His report has also been published today.

Mr Swinney said:

“Pupils have already lost a significant amount of learning time because of coronavirus (COVID-19). My priority is to ensure that learning is assessed fairly and consistently so that pupils can be confident in the results they gain.

“Given the real risk of further disruption to education, it would not be sensible or fair to plan for a full exam diet in 2021. Coronavirus has not gone away. If anything, it is making a comeback.

“In a normal exam year, National 5s constitute more than half of all exams taken. From a public health point of view, not running these exams significantly reduces risk. National 5 pupils will receive awards based on their coursework and the judgement of their teachers, with robust quality assurance. We have learned lessons from this year’s initial SQA gradings - there will be no algorithm for moderating grades in 2021.

“By replacing National 5 exams, we can hold an exam diet for Highers and Advanced Highers if public health guidance allows – these are the qualifications most pupils leave schools with that determine paths into work, college, or university.

“None of us can predict the coming weeks and months, so clear contingency plans are being developed should, for public health reasons, the exams have to be replaced. In those circumstances and only if necessary, we will award Higher and Advanced Higher grades based on teacher judgement, supported by SQA quality assurance, taking account of assessment evidence.

“My decisions on the 2021 exam diet were informed by Professor Priestley’s recommendations, widespread consultation by the SQA on the exams timetable and course assessment modifications, and by listening to the views of pupils, teachers, parents, education experts, local authorities and other stakeholders.

“We will continue to closely monitor public health advice and review arrangements as necessary. This will include key check-points up to the February break to assess public health advice and, in light of that, our plans.”

Background

Professor Priestley’s report and the Scottish Government’s response is published here. <https://www.gov.scot/isbn/9781800041660>

Higher and Advanced Higher exams will take place from 13 May until 4 June 2021.

Further guidance will be developed, based on the advice of our scientific advisors and the Education Recovery Group, on how to deliver examinations safely in the context of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the SQA will revise the conditions for exam invigilation.

Tweet 1

Education Secretary @JohnSwinney today confirmed plans for SQA awards 2021 → Higher and Advanced Highers exams will go ahead if safe to do so, with contingency plans developed

→ National 5 exams to be replaced with awards based on coursework and teacher judgement
See: *link to NR*

Graphic 1
SQA Awards 2021

Tweet 2

Higher and Advanced Highers exams will take place around two weeks later than usual, with contingency plans developed in case it proves impossible for exams to go ahead due to public health advice

Graphic 2
Higher and Advanced Higher exams to go ahead

Tweet 3

National 5 exams will be replaced with awards based on coursework and teacher judgement, @sqanews will publish guidance for teachers and the key pieces of work young people will need to complete

Graphic 3
National 5 exams replaced by coursework and teacher judgement

Tweet 4

Today @scotgov has published its response to @MarkRPriestley independent review of the events following the cancellation of the 2020 exam diet and recommendations for 2021.

→ Read Professor Priestley's report and @scotgov's response here: *link*

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Communications DFM & Education

Desk: 0131 244 [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Scottish Government | news.gov.scot

Enclosure 06 – Email: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

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

Sent: 16 November 2020 17:25

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

Subject: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

Hi Malcolm,

Here you go.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Enclosure 06.1 – Attachment: Word document

From: Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

16 November 2020

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

2021 HIGHER AND ADVANCED HIGHER EXAM DIET – ONGOING REVIEW OF DECISION

[Redacted – not in scope]

Background

1. In your 7 October statement to Parliament you confirmed the intention to proceed with Higher and Advanced Higher exams in May and set out the rationale for doing so. However, at the same time you were very clear that there was no way of knowing what circumstances we would face in the future in relation the pandemic. You emphasised the importance of avoiding decisions being made in extremis and of need for clear contingency plans for the Higher and Advanced Higher exams. You also confirmed that these plans would include key check-points up the February break to assess public health advice and our plans.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Next Steps

2. Timing is a critical consideration in all of this and in particular identifying when is the trigger point for any decision to cancel. The sooner any decision to cancel exams is made, the potentially better the contingency plan is. The longer you give it to see if exams can be run safely and fairly, the more sub-optimal the outcome if it turns out you can't run them, but at the same time you want to give them every chance to be able to take place...

[Redacted – not in scope]

Enclosure 07 – Email: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

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

Sent: 16 November 2020 19:20

To: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Fiona Robertson (fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk) <fiona.robertson@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

Hi Graeme, Fiona

Given timeframes, I am sending to you simultaneously. Attached is a draft note to DFM [Redacted – not in scope]. I am aiming to get to DFM by lunchtime tomorrow and would be grateful for any comments you have. Fiona – conscious that this could say more about SQA position/views, so happy to include more. Happy also to discuss tomorrow morning if helpful.

Thanks
Malcolm

Enclosure 07.1 – Attachment: Word document

From: Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

16 November 2020

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

2021 HIGHER AND ADVANCED HIGHER EXAM DIET – ONGOING REVIEW OF DECISION

[Redacted – not in scope]

Background

1. In your 7 October statement to Parliament you confirmed the intention to proceed with Higher and Advanced Higher exams in May and set out the rationale for doing so. However, at the same time you were very clear that there was no way of knowing what circumstances we would face in the future in relation the pandemic. You emphasised the importance of avoiding decisions being made in extremis and of need for clear contingency plans for the Higher and Advanced Higher exams. You also confirmed that these plans would include key check-points up the February break to assess public health advice and our plans.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Key Considerations and Next Steps

[Redacted – not in scope]

2. Timing is a critical consideration here and in particular identifying when is the trigger point for any decision to cancel. The sooner any decision to cancel exams is made, the potentially better the development and delivery of an alternative approach. The longer you give it to see if exams can be run safely and fairly, the greater the chance you provide for young people to be able to sit the exams determining their future path into work, college or university if public health guidance at the time allows it.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

COPY LIST TO BE ADDED

Enclosure 08 – Email: RE: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

From: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>
Sent: 17 November 2020 10:57
To: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

Thanks Graeme.

Just to be clear, Fiona is making time to look at the sub at 2pm. I've said I'll make some further edits based on my discussions with her this morning and ask that she adds her contributions to that. I'll send that to her before 2pm. I've stressed that we need to get this one up today.

Malcolm

From: Logan G (Graeme) <Graeme.Logan@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Director of Learning
Sent: 17 November 2020 10:51
To: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Qualifications - Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 - November 2020

Hi Malcolm

Excellent submission [Redacted – not in scope]. Please find attached a couple of tracked additions and one comment.

If Fiona is providing comments at 2pm it may be better to hold the submission until then so that you can reflect SQA headline views in the sub.

Thanks
Graeme.

[See Enclosure 07 for remainder of email chain]

Enclosure 09 – Email: Qualifications Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 November 2020 v3

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

Sent: 17 November 2020 21:43

To: Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>

Subject: Qualifications Advice to DFM on Higher and Advanced Higher Exams in 2021 November 2020 v3

Hi Graeme

As per message, please find attached proposed final version of exams sub for DFM.
Malcolm

Enclosure 09.1 – Attachment: Word document

From: Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

17 November 2020

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

2021 HIGHER AND ADVANCED HIGHER EXAM DIET – ONGOING REVIEW OF DECISION

[Redacted – not in scope]

Background

1. In your 7 October statement to Parliament you confirmed the intention to proceed with Higher and Advanced Higher exams in May and set out the rationale for doing so. However, at the same time you were very clear that there was no way of knowing what circumstances we would face in the future in relation to the pandemic. You emphasised the importance of avoiding decisions being made in extremis and of the need for clear contingency plans for the Higher and Advanced Higher exams. You also confirmed that these plans would include key check-points up the February break to assess public health advice and our plans.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Key Considerations and Next Steps

[Redacted – not in scope]

2. The timing of any decision to cancel exams, and in particular identifying when is the trigger point for any such decision, is an important consideration. While there are those that arguing that a decision to cancel H and AH exams should be made soon, collectively the system must be clear on what is done in the event that there is a cancellation. The National Qualifications 2021 Group has considered this twice but has not come to final conclusions and further workshops are planned.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness

Minister for Children and Young People			X		
Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science			X		
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government			X		

Permanent Secretary DG EC&J Director of Learning Director for Advanced Learning & Science Gayle Gorman Alan Armstrong Elizabeth Morrison Andy Drought Sam Anson Mick Wilson Roddy Macdonald Linda Pooley [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Colin McAllister [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Comms DFM
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Enclosure 10.1 – Attachment: Word document

From: Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

17 November 2020

Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

2021 HIGHER AND ADVANCED HIGHER EXAM DIET – ONGOING REVIEW OF DECISION

[Redacted – not in scope]

Background

1. In your 7 October statement to Parliament you confirmed the intention to proceed with Higher and Advanced Higher exams in May and set out the rationale for doing so. However, at the same time you were very clear that there was no way of knowing what circumstances we would face in the future in relation to the pandemic. You emphasised the importance of avoiding decisions being made in extremis and of the need for clear contingency plans for the Higher and Advanced Higher exams. You also confirmed that these plans would include key check-points up the February break to assess public health advice and our plans.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Key Considerations and Next Steps

[Redacted – not in scope]

2. The timing of any decision to cancel exams, and in particular identifying when is the trigger point for any such decision, is an important consideration. While there are those that arguing that a decision to cancel H and AH exams should be made soon, collectively the system must be clear on what is done in the event that there is a cancellation. The National Qualifications 2021 Group has considered this twice but has not come to final conclusions and further workshops are planned.

[Redacted – not in scope]

Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness

Minister for Children and Young People			X		
Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science			X		
Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government			X		

Permanent Secretary DG EC&J Director of Learning Director for Advanced Learning & Science Gayle Gorman Alan Armstrong Elizabeth Morrison Andy Drought Sam Anson Mick Wilson Roddy Macdonald Linda Pooley [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Colin McAllister [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Comms DFM
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[Redacted s38(1)(b)],

Please find below for DFM's consideration the readout from the session with School Leaders Scotland (SLS) on 18 November. The session took the form of opening remarks from the DFM followed by questions from attendees posed on their behalf by SLS President, Graham Hutton. The questions and DFM's responses were as follows. For the benefit of colleagues, I've grouped the questions by theme:

National Qualifications

[Redacted – not in scope]

- There was then a further question relating to assessment along the lines of, why delay the inevitable cancellation of Higher and Advanced Higher exams until February? **DFM replied pointing out that while there was a broad consensus around the approach to National 5 at the time of that announcement, the same was not the case for Higher and AH. He stressed that February is just the latest point at which the decision could be made and that he will not hold off making a decision until the last minute. He shared feedback from young people suggesting that they want the exam diet to go ahead. He stated that the evidence gathered will be reviewed in coming to a decision.**

[Redacted – not in scope]

Yours,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Teacher Professional Learning & Leadership

Scottish Government, Learning Directorate
Workforce, Infrastructure and Reform Division
2B North, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ

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

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

