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Enclosure 1 – Email: SQA ACM - a teacher's experience

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 17 June 2021 17:28
To: Public Engagement Unit <CorrespondenceUnit@gov.scot>
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Subject: FW: SQA ACM - a teacher's experience

Upload to MiCase as OR please

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] T: 0131 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E:
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From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@parliament.scot> **On Behalf Of** Somerville S (Shirley-Anne), MSP
Sent: 17 June 2021 17:14
To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Subject: FW: SQA ACM - a teacher's experience

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gmail.com>
Sent: 15 June 2021 20:33
To: Somerville S (Shirley-Anne), MSP <Shirley-Anne.Somerville.msp@parliament.scot>
Subject: Re: SQA ACM - a teacher's experience

Dear Ms Somerville

Sorry - I pressed 'return' in the wrong place in my previous email! I'm so stressed and tired!

Long story short, I went to the Head teacher to ask for her understanding of 'holistic' assessment, and she pulled out our last three or five years awards statistics and used that to discuss how I'm predicting grades. My head of department says they are under pressure to account for patterns in this year's results so they are going to focus on marks to uphold standards. I've also been told that, since SQA places less value on Unit assessments, they are of limited value as part of holistic assessment and they can't advise me how to 'weight' the evidence I have.

My head is spinning!

Our school had very little Covid disruption, other than the lockdowns, but they still lost 14 weeks' full-time school; they had 16 weeks' full time and 2 weeks blended

learning until Easter. The loss for my less academic students is that the coaching I usually put in place to prepare them for the traditional exam just couldn't happen. They could learn the academic course content in lockdown, but they didn't have all the class practice in problem solving and question practice. I feel these skills were impacted more than acquiring knowledge in lockdown.

N5 students have generally coped well, but the results for my Higher class practice tests after Easter were heart-breaking. They were so apprehensive when they came back to school and then became even more anxious since most of them were in their 6th year and relying on results for apprenticeships, college or university. Their marks from the SQA 'evidence-gathering' assessment were almost all one grade below what I expected and some were two grades below. I have looked at adjusting the grade boundaries to achieve a fairer outcome for the cohort, and I have kept within the range SQA has used in previous years, but my head of department thinks that, while SQA can have a pass mark of 45.8%, that is no reason for me to recommend 46%.

I know there is nothing you can do about local applications of the system, but I thought I should let you know that I cannot honour your cast-iron guarantee because the ACM is also not as flexible on the ground as you may have been led to believe. I was placed under the same pressure last year and three of my students did not receive what I had recommended and I can't face my students if it happens again.

I have a lot of varied experience teaching at school, college and university levels, so I consider myself to be a highly skilled and confident professional; the ACM does not phase me, but it may not be what you think it is.

Thank you for inviting teachers to write. I don't expect a response or anything, but I feel it's important to contribute to change if I can.

I wish you and the government well in your ambitious programme to improve education.

kind regards

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

On Tue, Jun 15, 2021 at 7:43 PM [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gmail.com> wrote:

Dear Ms Somerville

I am not complaining about the ACM, but about the mixed messaging from SQA. You asked for people to write to you if they were being pressured to conform to previous norms and school results patterns. Contrary to what my head of department management said in the last month about predicted grades being a holistic assessment, on Thursday I was issued with data about the last 5 years' performances, and asked to average the last 5 years' cut-off scores to establish grade boundaries. I went to

You have stated that teachers have flexibility to use a variety of assessment materials and approaches to generate a student's best achievement, and that students will receive what their teacher believes they are worth on the basis of that.

I have not been allowed to exercise any flexibility because science evidence must cover 100% of the course in two assessments, one of which covers at least 70% of the course. This prompted my department managers to opt for splitting the SQA 'paper' into two parts on the same day. To all intents and purposes, this was a traditional SQA exam. Also, because of the pressure of assessment, I could not choose the dates, or operate them in my classroom.

This would be a new experience for S4 and S5, so I gave them a number of 'practice' assessments to prepare for the SQA 'evidence-gathering' assessment. This enabled them to identify strengths and weaknesses, and I hoped it would help them to build resilience and confidence.

for the current

Enclosure 2 – Email: FAO. Education Minister: Assignments for Nat 5s, Higher and Adv. Higher

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)] @glow.sch.uk>

Sent: 23 June 2021 22:04

To: Scottish Ministers <Scottish_Ministers@gov.scot>

Subject: FAO. Education Minister: Assignments for Nat 5s, Higher and Adv. Higher

Hi, I teach [Redacted s38(1)(b)] but am also writing this as a parent of a girl about to start her Highers.

Practical subjects teach and assess children in areas beyond simple memorisation of facts. We teach practical skills and techniques and during the Assignments, the children are rewarded for their ability in these areas.

Curriculum for excellence was about moving away from a system that only valued the memorisation of facts and completely ignored other types of intelligence.

As a parent of a girl who is practically very able in Music and Chemistry, I would be saddened if this years exams were entirely paper based. Many of the children I teach are dyslexic and often it is in the practical subjects that they can demonstrate all of their differing types of intelligence and as these contribute towards their final grade, are rewarded appropriately for the sum of all of their intelligences.

I am acutely aware of how difficult teaching has been this year and how much stress the uncertainty itself has brought. But I also believe that online learning has skewed the balance of academic achievement towards those who can read and memorise and those whose skills lie elsewhere have been more adversely affected. For this reason I would ask that the Assignments for “practical” subjects be kept on the table and only removed if absolutely necessary. If time needs to be saved then the more equitable thing to do would be to reduce content, not change a practical subject into an academic exercise and undervalue the potential of some of our most talented children.

The alternative would be for these pupils to score much lower and reinforce the belief that learning and school is not for them, a truly 1970's attitude.

I could quote all kinds of educational research and pull out extracts from the design of CofE but I think I've made my point, could we please not bin the Assignments.

Yours

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]