

INITIAL FOI REFERENCE: FOI 202100231966

INITIAL FOI REQUEST: The Scottish Government has today confirmed that exams will take place in 2022 (if safe to do so) - <https://www.gov.scot/news/national-qualifications-2022/> Please release any documents (such as advice, analysis, briefings, options documents etc) outlining / analysing / considering etc. the options available for national qualifications in 2022. Date range 20/5/21 – present

INDEX OF ENCLOSURES

No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Review – Retain initial decision / change decision	Clause	Review comments
001	Attachment: Word doc	27 May 2021 14:30	Out of scope	Retain		The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
002	Attachment: Word doc	10 June 2021 13:45	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
003	Attachment: 2022 National Qualifications Approach - Update	14 June 2021 17:42	Free and frank exchange of views Personal information	Release further info	s.30(b)(ii) S38(1)(b)	The review noted that certain content was excluded from the initial FOI release on the basis that it was “free and frank” but the information did not in fact fall under the definition of free/frank and can now be released.
004	Attachment: Summary of Young people’s views about assessment 2022	18 June 2021 08:24		Retain	s.30(b)(ii)]	The review concluded that the content was included/excluded appropriately. No further changes recommended.
005	Attachment: Word doc	24 June 2021 17:36	Out of scope Free and frank exchange of views Confidential Information Personal information	Release further info	~ s.30(b)(ii) S36(1) S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that some of the information initially redacted does not in fact fall under the scope of “free and frank”. The review concluded that other items did fall under scope of “free and frank”, and should be withheld on the same basis as initially.
006	Attachment: Learner Panel V2	30 June 2021 13:06	Personal information Free and frank exchange of views Out of scope	Release further info	S38(1)(b) s.30(b)(ii) ~	The review concluded that some information should continue to be withheld because it contains exchanges, the release of which would impact on the future free and frank exchange of views on policy considerations. Other items (a portion of the main covering paper and the entire annex) should be released as the information is factual and does not constitute the exchange of views on policy considerations
007	Attachment: FW: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments	14 July 2021 09:00	missing	Further Cons (Can’t find file))	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
007.1	Letter from Secretary of State	13 July 2021 12:35	Personal Information	Retain	S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
008	FW: LETTER FROM UKG SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION - QUALIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENTS	16 July 2021 10:22	Personal information	Retain	S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
008.1	Attachment: Email FW: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments		Personal information	Retain	S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
008.2	Attachment: PDF		Out of scope	Retain		The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
009	Attachment: Options Paper ACM 2022 for NQ WG 21	21 July 2021 18:28	Personal Information Free and frank exchange of views	Redact as FOI 231959	s.30(b)(ii) S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
010	Attachment: Word Doc: Mr Hepburn briefing	22 July 2021 09:29	Possible out of scope	Retain		The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.

No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Review – Retain initial decision / change decision	Clause	Review comments
011	Attachment: Word Doc: Learning for Sustainability and STEM - Briefing	27 July 2021 12:04	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012	Attachment: PDF	29 July 2021 06:59	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.1	Attachment: PDF		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.2	Attachment: PDF		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.3	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.4	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.5	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.6	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.7	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.8	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
012.9	Attachment: Word doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
013	Attachment: Word Doc: FE-HE and Students	02 August 2021 13:37	Out of scope	Retain	S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
014	Attachment: Word Doc	04 August 2021 16:24	Free and frank exchange of views Personal information Out of scope Confidential Information Ministerial communications	Release further info	s.30(b)(ii) S38(1)(b) ~ S36(1) S29(1)(b)	The review concluded that some items of information are not in fact substantive exchange of views or advice for the purpose of policy formulation, and therefore do not fall under the scope of "free and frank"; and should therefore now be released. Remaining items within the enclosure do fall under "free and frank" and should be withheld.
015	Attachment: Word Doc- Exam Diet 2021 - Briefing	5 August 2021 13:44	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
015.1	Attachment: Word Doc - Exam Diet 2021 – Summary Tables		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
016	Attachment: Word Doc: Exam Diet 2021 – Briefing – Ministerial Submission 01	5 August 2021 17:41	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
017	Attachment: Word Doc: Results Day Narrative 2021 Draft	6 August 2021 10:16	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
018	Attachment: Email: FW: FOR CLEARANCE: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams - Herald	6 August 2021 17:36	Personal information Out of scope	Release further info	S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the information highlighted should be released as it relates to the FOI request and is in scope, but does not constitute "free and frank" exchange of views for the purposes of policy formulation.
019	Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 – Advice to Cab Sec	6 August 2021 18:00		Retain		The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.

No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Review – Retain initial decision / change decision	Clause	Review comments
020	Attachment: Word Doc: Assessment 2022 – Ministerial Submission	06 August 2021 18:00	Personal information Out of scope	Retain	S38(1)(b) ~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
021	Attachment: Word Doc: Exam Diet 2021 – Briefing	09 August 2021 15:30	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
022	Attachment: Word Doc	09 August 2021 19:54	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
022.1	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
022.2	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
022.3	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
022.4	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
023	Attachment: Word Doc – NQ – Results Day 10 Aug –	09 August 2021 20:47	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
023.1	Attachment: Word Doc – Core Narrative		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
024	Attachment: Word Doc – NQ- Results Day 10 Aug	09 August 2021 20:55	Out of scope Personal Information	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
024.1	Attachment: Word Doc – Core	09 August 2021 20:55	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
025	Attachment: Word Doc	10 August 2021 08:59	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
026	Attachment: Word Doc	10 August 2021 08:59	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
027	Attachment: Word Doc	10 August 2021 09:38	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
027.1	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
028	Attachment: Cab Sec ES to First Minister – School Exams 2021-2022	10 August 2021 16:46	Ministerial communications	Retain	S29(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
029	Attachment: Word Doc	10 August 2021 17:46	Out of scope Personal information	Retain	~ S38(1)(b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
029.1	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
030	Attachment: Word Doc – Briefing Pack	10 August 2021 18:42	Out of scope	Release further info	~	The review concluded that whilst some of the information was clearly out of scope, other bullet points (e.g. on OECD review) were more relevant to 2022 exam diet and there was no clear public interest in withholding. The item on Government Inspired Question, is procedural in nature and should be released. The final item on wider UK plans could be argued to be relevant to decision-making in Scotland,

No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Review – Retain initial decision / change decision	Clause	Review comments
						and therefore in scope but with no clear public interest in withholding.
031	Attachment: Word Doc	11 August 2021 19:34	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
031.1	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
031.2	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
031.3	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
031.4	Attachment: Word Doc		Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
032	Attachment: Word Doc	13 August 2021 17:13	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
033	Attachment: Word Doc	13 August 2021 17:59	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
034	Attachment: Word Doc	13 August 2021 20:50	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
035	Attachment: SAS_edit_QUALIFICATIONS 2022 Cabinet Paper	14 August 2021 09:43	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii) section 29(1) (b)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
036	Attachment: Word Doc	14 August 2021 16:34	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
036.1	Attachment: Word Doc		Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
037	Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper	15 August 2021 10:48	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
038	Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper	15 August 2021 11:05	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
039	Attachment: Word Doc Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper – 17 Aug	15 August 2021 19:55	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
040	Attachment: Word Doc	16 August 2021 15:08	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
041	Attachment: FW: Cabinet: 17 August: Cabinet Paper: ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22	16 August 2021 19:09	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
042	Attachment: Qualification 2022 Cabinet Paper – 17 Aug – Speaking Note	16 August 2021 20:49	Free and frank exchange of views	Retain	s.30(b)(ii)	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
043	Attachment: Word Doc	17 August 2021 11:11		Retain		The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.
044	Attachment: Word Doc	17 August	Out of scope	Retain	~	The review concluded that the content was excluded appropriately. No further material should be included.

No.	Description	Date	Explanation of redactions	Review – Retain initial decision / change decision	Clause	Review comments
		2021 19:12				
045	Attachment: ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS 2022	18 August 2021 10:07	Out of scope	Release further info	s.25(1)	The review concluded that whilst some of the information was clearly out of scope, other bullet points on OECD review were more relevant to 2022 exam diet and there was no clear public interest in withholding. The item on Government Inspired Question, is procedural in nature and there is no clear public interest in withholding those lines. The final item on wider UK plans could be argued to be relevant to decision-making in Scotland, and therefore in scope but with no clear public interest in withholding.

Enclosure 001 Attachment: Word doc

Out of Scope

No decisions have yet been taken in relation to the 2021/22 qualifications approach.

- *Discussions will be held with stakeholders through the National Qualifications 2021 Group based on latest public health advice, and a decision made in time to allow centres to plan for delivery from the start of the new academic session.*
- *Contingencies will be considered to allow for any further disruption to learning that may occur.*

Out of scope

Enclosure 002 - Attachment: Word doc

Out of scope

No decisions have been taken in relation to the 2021/22 qualifications approach.

- Discussions will be held with stakeholders through the National Qualifications 2021 Group based on latest public health advice, and a decision made in time to allow centres to plan for delivery from the start of the new academic session.
- Contingencies will be considered to allow for any further disruption to learning that may occur.
- Decisions regarding timetabling are for individual local authorities and schools.
- The Scottish Government's key priority remains educating children safely while affording them the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Out of scope

Enclosure 003 - Attachment: 2022 National Qualifications Approach - Update

From: Malcolm Pentland

Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
14 June 2021

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

2022 National Qualifications Approach - Update

Purpose

1. To provide an update on SQA proposals in relation to arrangements for assessment of National Courses for academic year 2021-22 and, subject to your being content with those proposals, to seek your agreement to including confirmation of plans in your parliamentary statement on 22 June.

Priority

2. **Urgent** – preparations are being made for your parliamentary statement on 22 June and you may wish to confirm assessment arrangements for next year ahead of most schools finishing for the summer holidays.

Background

3. Briefing on the working assumption in relation to the approach to the assessment of national qualifications in 2022 was set out in a submission from Sara Lightbody on 27 May 2021. Since then the SQA has ensured further consideration of the proposed approach by the National Qualifications 2021 Group and the SQA's Qualifications Committee. We understand that the SQA Board approved the approach last week and that the Chief Examiner will be writing to you imminently. She will set out the approach in more detail and seek your support for it.
4. The SQA recognises the significance of the work being done by the OECD and the implications of this for future of National Courses and their assessment but also emphasise that some time will be required to develop the next generation of National Courses. It will, therefore, propose that for the 2021-22 academic year:
 - an examination diet takes place in April/May 2022 with external assessment of both question papers and coursework (subject to the public health position making it safe to do so);
 - there would be course modifications to take account of the loss of learning and restrictions on time as learners; and
 - the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) developed for this year (and reviewed for potential improvements) would be used as the contingency should the examination diet subsequently need to be cancelled.
5. Subject to your being supportive of the SQA proposals, we recommend incorporating announcement of these arrangements into your parliamentary statement on 22 June.

Recommendation

6. The you:

- note this update and that the Chief Examiner will be writing to you imminently setting out SQA's proposals for the assessment of National Courses next academic year;
- indicate that you are content for officials to plan on the basis that you will confirm arrangements for 2022 in your 22 June statement.

Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
14 June 2021

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness
Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training			x		
DG Education and Justice Director of Learning [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Analysis Sam Anson, Learning Directorate Mick Wilson, Learning Directorate Andy Drought, Learning Directorate Liza McLean, Learning Directorate Alison Taylor, Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Learning Directorate [Redacted s38(1)(b)], SGLD [Redacted s38(1)(b)], SGLD [Redacted s38(1)(b)], SGLD Comms Education [Redacted s38(1)(b)], Comms Colin McAllister, Special Adviser					

Enclosure 004 - Attachment: Summary of Young people's views about assessment 2022

Young people's views about assessment 2022 - Data gathered from young people in June 2021

Please note that we have gathered the views below from a small group of young people within a very tight timescale (less than 24 hours) at the request of Scottish Government officials. These views are not representative and, as such, we would be grateful if they were shared privately with officials and the Cabinet Secretary only.

Many young people feel their rights have not been upheld in decision-making on exams and assessment this year. Going forward, we feel it is essential that this is resolved, and that young people are put at the heart of these decisions.

While we recognise that timescales are very tight, we feel that young people do need to be consulted in a meaningful way on assessments 2022. The Learner Panel that we deliver for SQA would be a good vehicle for gathering these views in a meaningful way, with the appropriate timescales in place, and subject to agreement with SQA.

Should we go back to an exam system?

- *"I sat my Nat5 exams in the old system. I think it works for certain people and others not so much. I think it does not test pupils knowledge in a fair way and having one chance to prove yourself isn't enough."*
- *"Anyone I've spoke to all have different opinions, some people want the old exam system back and others are completely against it but I guess it just depends on how people learn and like to be tested on their knowledge".*
- *"I feel the old system tested everybody equally as we all sat the same exams at the same time therefore no cheating could be done like this years TikTok escapade. Also, the ACM is such a stress on teachers. They have to mark all the 'assessments' as well as keep up with teaching and other marking. This system is not fair on them."*
- *From what I've heard from my friends most people want the old exam system only because their qualifications are viewed as more valid and worth something - so if the other system could guarantee validity then more people would want it. There is a lot of misconceptions that grades were just handed out this year and last year and people worry that universities don't regard them to the same level as previous years. If we did return to an exam system i think significant modification would be necessary. it shouldn't all depend on a one day exam and should include more aspects of class work etc*

If we did go back to an exam system, what should we change about it to make it better?

- *"If we were to go back to the old exam system I think the SQA and the government need to ensure students are taught the areas that they will be questioned on in the paper because in subjects like Maths it's such a broad subject and having more specific teaching in the weeks leading up to the exam can help pupils understand certain areas to a better extent."*
- *"There has to be some sort of assurance that students are taught key areas in the exam for example this year for my higher RMPS, I was not taught the philosophical*

part of the course then the SQA said they needed that part and I had a week to learn the entire philosophical course and sit my 'assessment'."

Should we keep the ACM assessments system in some form rather than returning to exams?

- *"I think the ACM in a way better state is what is best. But it only works if it's used fairly and properly unlike this year."*
- *"In my opinion the ACM was a duplicate of the old Exam system, the only difference is that we sat the papers at different times and they were internally marked."*
- *"As someone that's been doing them the past few days, and have one today, (the 2021 system) is not very good. As others have said; no study leave and still having to go to other classes even though you might have an exam later that day in another subject - additionally we've had very short notice about timetables + they're all jam-packed together over the space of 1 or 2 weeks for the most part"*
- *"Papers must be sat at the same time to stop leaks, there must be clear rules about "resits", there must be exceptional circumstances appeals"*

If we did keep the ACM assessment model, is there anything that needs to change about it?

- *"The teachers should not have to mark them, I've seen how stressed they've become with that extra workload and some teachers have told me it's not even worth the money. All schools need to be as similar as possible, none of the one school does multiple exams in one week whereas the next school does them spaced out. They also need to space assessments out from the beginning till the end of the year so it doesn't replicate a normal school year as it did this year. Also if COVID is still around, self isolation and being off because you have COVID need to be taken into consideration because some people I know have had weeks off school due to this."*
- *"If they were continuing with the ACM, there would need to be assessments throughout the year and not just at the end of the year like this year was."*
- *"The schools were left to their own devices, advising schools shouldn't replicate exam diet but from my own experience we have been exam day after day with the papers reduced or halved and completed the following day. From looking on tiktok there have been students sitting in exam halls (I can send the video) replicating what looks to be an exam diet. Although schools had been left to do whatever they were giving no other choice considering the distribution the lockdown had brought. If someone is unhappy with their grade because they have missed a lot of content for example to Covid then they should be allowed to appeal that grade however the SQA have still not outlined what the appeals system will exactly have in it (who can appeal)."*

Enclosure 005, Attachment: Word Doc

[Additional note to FOI Requester: In conducting this FOI review it was noticed that the version of the following submission included in the initial FOI response was not the final version of the submission. The submission has therefore been replaced with this lengthier final submission which matches the release relating to the Review of FOI Reference 202100231959. The portions of the submission where additional information was released as part of the Review of FOI Reference 202100231959 are marked in grey.]

From: Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
24 June 2021

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22: OPTIONS

Purpose

1. To provide an overview of possible options for assessment of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in the 2021-22 academic session, in advance of a meeting with officials on Friday 25 June.

Timing

2. **Urgent;** this paper is provided to support a meeting taking place at 1330 on Friday 25 June.

Detail

2020

3. In 2019/20 exams were cancelled on 19 March 2020 on the basis of public health advice that it was not safe to proceed with an examination diet. The SQA was asked to develop an alternative approach to certification. An alternative model based on teacher estimates of learner attainment was used with the SQA applying an algorithm to moderate teacher estimates. Due to public perceptions of unfairness a Ministerial Direction issued to SQA following Results Day in August 2020 and the results were subsequently reverted to teacher estimates where their moderated result was lower.

2021

4. In 2020/21, informed by the recommendations of the Priestley Review of the 2020 National Qualifications experience, the examination diet for National 5

qualifications was cancelled on 7 October 2020 due to the level of disruption already experienced by, and likely to be experienced by, many learners and on the basis that a full diet was, at that point in the pandemic, considered too great a risk in terms of public health.

5. The examination diet for Highers and Advanced Highers was subsequently also cancelled, on 8 December 2020. This decision was taken on the basis that, in order to take place, exams had to be safe and fair. At that time, ahead of the pandemic's second wave, public health prospects had improved but disruption to learning for many learners (including a significant percentage of the most deprived) had already been significant. It was on this basis, and the uncertain public health position, that the decision was taken to cancel all exams in 2020.

6. Following the cancellation of the National 5 exams, the National Qualifications 2021 Group was established. The Group developed the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) as a temporary measure for this year, based on teacher judgement of demonstrated learner attainment, to ensure delivery of a credible and fair set of results .

OECD Review/Future Transformation

7. Prior to the decision to cancel the 2020 examination diet, exams had been held in Scotland every year for over 130 years. The decision, and developments since it, sparked significant debate about the future of assessment and qualifications in Scotland and the best way to recognise learners' achievements. One of the measures taken following Results Day in 2020 was to commission the OECD to extend its review and consider options for transforming the Scottish approach to assessment and qualifications.

8. Any revised or new system of qualifications, will need to be informed by the outcomes from the OECD comparative research on assessment and qualifications that is due to publish in August, along with full stakeholder engagement. It should be noted that any major reform of the qualifications system will likely take at least three years to develop and fully implement. However, any decision about how to assess National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses next year will inevitably be set against the OECD Review published on 21 June and the forthcoming OECD Report from Professor Stobart on Qualifications and Assessment.

9. As such, it will be important to be clear in any messaging that any changes to the qualifications system that existed pre-Covid-19, for the 2022 qualifications, are based purely on ongoing effects of Covid-19, such as significant disruption to learning, and/or public health grounds. Any decisions on the 2021/22 academic session are not an indication of any future direction for the qualifications which will be considered separately after due consultation.

Stakeholder Views

10. Learners, teachers and the system are all keen to understand how qualifications will be assessed in 2022. [Review decision: Redacted under s.30(b)(ii)]

11. The Chief Examiner wrote to you on 18 June, providing her strong advice that there should be an exam diet for the graded national courses (National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher) in the 2021-22 academic session with minor modifications to the course requirements. The advice included retaining the 2020-21 ACM as a fall-back contingency option with pre-determined check points through the year informed by public health advice.

12. [Review decision: Redacted under s.30(b)(ii)]

13. You responded to the Chief Examiner on 22 June, and announced in parliament on the same day, that you wanted to take more time to gather wider views, consider the issues and take account of the latest public health advice before confirming any plans in advance of the new school term in August.

Options for 2021-22 National Qualifications

14. There are a range of possible options for the approach to graded national courses in 2021-22, although some carry significant risk:

[Review decision: Redacted under s.30(b)(ii)]

Public Health Advice

15. Key to making decisions on this issue will be any modelling around the state of the pandemic and access to public health advice in late July/early August.

16. Officials are continuing to work with key partners, including through the COVID-19 Education Recovery Group, to develop and issue updated guidance that will support schools to reopen safely after the summer holidays.

17. Guidance issued to local authorities last week, ahead of the end of term states that schools should retain the current mitigations until the end of term with the logistical starting point being the same mitigations after the summer holidays.

18. Mitigations will not be in place any longer than necessary. However, schools will need time to remove mitigations at the start of term if it is safe to do so, particularly the more logistically challenging ones (e.g. staggered start and stop times, groupings, etc).

19. A review is currently underway to consider how best to minimise disruption to children and young people's education, including, as you identified in your statement earlier this week, by identifying whether and to what extent the requirement for young people to self-isolate as contacts of positive cases can safely be reduced in future.

20. Any changes here could have a significant bearing on the extent of disruption for individual learners in the next school year, and in turn any decision on whether to hold an exam diet or use an ACM.

21. We will continue to draw on the expert advice of clinicians and the Advisory Sub-group on Education and Children's Issues to inform any decisions and, with your approval, we suggest we seek advice from clinical advisors in early August to inform a final decision on the approach to assessment in 2021/22.

Legal Advice

Review decision:: Redacted under S 36 (1)

Equality and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments

22. As was the case for 2020 and 2021, officials will need to carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment and Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment for any decision not to proceed with an exam diet again in 2021-22.

23. In addition, in implementing any decision, the SQA is also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and, as a public authority, it is subject to the same constraints as Ministers (mentioned in paragraph 25), as well as in compliance with the Convention rights. Subject to the outcome of the reference by the UK Government's Law Officers to the Supreme Court, the provisions of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill would apply to both Ministers and the SQA from the time it is commenced, which might conceivably be within school year 2021/22.

rUK Position

24. In the rest of the UK:

- England have now confirmed that they plan to go ahead with an exam diet in 2022 with possible modifications to take account of disruption.
- Wales officials have advised that adaptations that were planned for summer 2021 will be a starting point for 2022, with reduced assessment content. They are consulting with teaching unions.
- On 17 May, Northern Ireland announced their intention to proceed with exams in 2022, with adaptations and a reduced number of exams. It was confirmed that there would also be contingency arrangements for alternative awarding based on centre professional judgement if required.

Next Steps

25. As Stage 4 (the submission of provisional results) of the ACM completes tomorrow (25 June), it is proposed that further engagement be carried out over the next two to three weeks to gather further views on options around assessment in 2021-22, particularly in relation to young people.

26. This engagement could include input from SQA's Learner Panel, as suggested by the Scottish Youth Parliament. We are exploring this possibility with SQA as a matter of urgency. We can also seek further input from the teaching unions.

27. In addition, officials could explore with NPFS options for gathering wider parental views although, as with learners, these are likely to generate a range of opposing views given the disparate nature of these stakeholders.

28. Once these views are gathered, they can be considered alongside the latest public health advice at that point to inform a decision in advance of the return of schools in August.

Recommendation

29. The Cabinet Secretary is invited to:

- Note potential options for approaching the assessment of graded national courses in the 2021-22 academic session;
- Agree to officials seeking seek advice from clinical advisors in early August to inform a final decision on the approach to assessment in 2021/22.
- Indicate whether she has any views on these options prior to officials taking forward any engagement with stakeholders.

Malcolm Pentland
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division

24 June 2021

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness
Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training			x		
DG Education and Justice Director of Learning Director of Advanced Learning and Science Linda Pooley, Learning Directorate Malcolm Pentland, Learning Directorate [redacted s.38(1)(b)] Sam Anson, Learning Directorate Mick Wilson, Learning Directorate Andy Drought, Learning Directorate Liza McLean, Learning Directorate Alison Taylor, Learning Directorate [redacted s.38(1)(b)] Comms Education [redacted s.38(1)(b)] Colin McAllister, Special Adviser					

Enclosure 006 - Attachment: Learner Panel V2

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

Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
30 June 2021

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

LEARNER VOICE THROUGH THE LEARNER PANEL

Purpose

1 To provide an overview of the SQA's Learner Panel, how learner voice has been heard as part of the ACM process in 2020-2021, and how this can be improved in session 2021-2022

Timing

2 Routine

Background

3 Following recent discussions at the NQ21 Group on SQA proposals for the assessment of NQs next academic year [Redacted S 30(b)(ii)]

This note provides an update on the role and work of the SQA Learner Panel to date. Annex A includes SQA Learner Engagement paper. Annex B highlights key outcomes and outputs from Learner Panel meetings.

Detail

4 The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) established a Learner Panel in November 2020. This panel allows Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs) who are learning in schools and colleges, or to give honest and open feedback to the SQA on policies and decisions that impact young people. The SYP has been commissioned to support the SQA to ensure the learner panel is co-designed with a focus on themes including education recovery, assessment, equality, and attainment. Membership is from a range of learner organisations including the Scottish Youth Parliament, Carers Trust Scotland, SPARQS (college learners) as well as from individual school and college learners.

5 This follows previous work SYP has done in partnership with the SQA. SYP delivered a series of focus groups asking young people what they thought of the proposed changes to the assessment model and the equality impact the alternative certification model will have on learners, which was published in August 2020.

Session 2020/2021

6 Below is a summary of Learner Panel meetings and topics discussed:

Date	Main Topics Discussed
26 November 2020	Quality Assurance related to the ACM
17 December 2020	Learner Disruption

25 January 2021	Appeals
25 February 2021	ACM & The Learner Booklet
23 March 2021	Appeals Consultation; Planning sub-group; SQA Branding
26 April 2021	Assessment; Appeals; Communication

Session 2021/2022

7 The most recent meeting of the Learner Panel Meeting was on Tuesday 29 June at 5pm. The focus of this panel was a review of the ACM '21 model followed by a focus on 2022. This meeting took the form of a workshop, with SYP staff facilitating the session encouraging participation. Officials should receive notes on this meeting shortly and these will be shared with Cabinet Secretary.

8 A member of SQA staff has recorded a video message about 2022 options and the future of assessment and this was sent to the Learner Panel on 17 June. Feedback is currently being received and analysed.

9 The next again panel will take place on Tuesday 27 July and thereafter on the last Tuesday of every month.

10 Other planned Learner engagement

- Virtual event for young people to ask questions about NQ21 ACM/Appeals, with Capital FM – w/c 28/06/2021
- Enquire – the Scottish advice service for additional support for learning live event 23/06/2021
- Who Cares? Scotland – meeting took place on Friday 18th June to answer their questions about the ACM and Appeals. Further meeting being scheduled to discuss future Learner engagement and Certification Day event. Who Cares? Scotland have been asked to nominate Learners they work with to join the Learner Panel.
- Planning of a Q&A session over the summer on SQA Facebook platform for learners to ask SQA and partner agencies any questions they may have about results and appeals

Next Steps

11 [Redacted Section 30(b)(ii)]

12 [Redacted Section 30(b)(ii)]

13 [Redacted Section 30(b)(ii)]

Recommendation

14 [Redacted Section 30(b)(ii)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]
Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
30 June 2021

Learner engagement update

1. Introduction

The purpose of SQA's learner engagement activities is to ensure that learners have a voice and input into the work that we do and on the decisions that affect them – they need to be an integral part of our work as our success relies on having a deep understanding of their needs as a key audience group.

We want to ensure that SQA is a leading public body in ensuring that children's rights are recognised, as set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). We have an overarching commitment to increasing engagement with young people by recognising and listening to them in our work.

We want to reassure learners and their parents/carers that they are at the heart of what we do, that we are collaborating with learner/parent/carer representative organisations, and that the standards of the qualifications learners are working on are valuable and will help them take their next steps into further learning, training or employment.

This paper provides a summary on work to date and next steps to progress this important work.

2. Approach

Many learners view SQA as distant and bureaucratic. It should therefore be our goal to build a two-way relationship with our learners, in particular ensuring that they feel a key part of SQA, that their opinions are valued and that they can help to shape and influence SQA activity.

SQA's learner strategy will strengthen our approach and provide consistency to learner engagement. It will include a framework that best suits the needs of our learners and will potentially find new ways to engage with them. It will also ensure that parents and carers are considered and included as part of this work.

Our learners come from a variety of backgrounds and are at different stages in their learning. They include school pupils and college students, those learning through training providers, apprentices, adult learners, those learning in employment and those keen to return to employment.

This strategy will enhance and support SQA's approach in relation to learners and will help us to ensure that learners are at the heart of our delivery. The development of our learner strategy will help ensure that SQA works in a consistent way across the business, for all learner groups. In addition, engaging with our learners will help to build on, and improve our profile and reputation. In understanding an appropriate level of engagement with learners, the strategy will consider examples of established engagement models such as the International Association for Public Perception (IAP2) and the Scottish Community Engagement Framework. The strategy will then propose and implement a suitable model for SQA to engage with our learners.

3. Where are we now

There is already a great deal of direct engagement with young people in different areas of SQA, however, this activity is not co-ordinated or reported on consistently.

- Bespoke engagement work such as the Young Scot Future of Assessment report and its recommendations
- Ongoing engagement and improvement of content and services eg. Your Exams, Your Coursework, mobile apps, websites where young people come into SQA and test/provide feedback on content and services
- HN redevelopment – engaging with students to get their views on proposals
- Direct feedback from young people through SQA’s communication channels
- OD engagement with young people through SQA’s apprenticeship programme
- Operations and corporate engagement with the Scottish Youth Parliament, and in particular their Education committee
- As a national corporate parent, SQA’s support of care experienced young people, including engagement with organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways
- As part of our Responsible Business strategy, providing volunteering opportunities for our staff to provide mentoring, reading and writing, and employability advice and support, to young people in our local communities
- As a responsible public body, providing work experience opportunities to young people from local schools
- Young person representatives on our senior committees – Qualifications Committee, NQ 2021 Group
- SQA Learner Panels – listening to the views of learners and creating an opportunity for openness and transparency

As part of the work relating to qualification delivery in NQ2021 additional activities and measures have been undertaken to ensure that young people’s voices are heard.

3.1 Communications and Marketing learner engagement project

A strategic project within Communications & Marketing commenced in late 2020, with representation from all areas of Communications as well as Operations (Liaison Managers) and Business Development (Regional Managers). The group has been liaising with other colleagues from across the business as required to obtain insights and feedback to help with this work.

As our learner audience is so diverse the group has been taking a phased approach. In recognising the need to support work on the 2021 exam diet and alternative certification model for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, the immediate focus has been on National Qualification (NQ) learners and considering how best to support them. A variety of innovative content proposals have been developed that are now being developed for use, peer reviewed by young people.

The National Qualifications 2021 Group includes representation from the Scottish Youth Parliament. We work with them on developing and distributing the group updates to young people, ensuring that the messages are relevant and understandable and issued to them through appropriate channels.

Young people have told us that they want to receive information directly from SQA. We therefore developed two printed information booklets and associated digital campaigns which were distributed to all National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher learners in March and June 2021. These booklets provide learners with the most up to date information and provide links to learner support and a dedicated learner page on SQA’s website so that they can keep up to date on the arrangements for 2020-21.

SQA continues to engage and share messages with learner agencies, such as Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament, and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland. We are also co-ordinating our activities with the Scottish Government's Youth Education Recovery Group to ensure broad engagement with learners on issues that affect them.

The group continues to focus on providing useful communications and content for SQA's learners and parents/carers.

3.2 Learner strategy development

Given the importance of progressing this work, a dedicated project lead, [Redacted S38(1)(b)] was appointed in January 2021, to consider all aspects of our work with young people and their parents/carers, and to turn this into a programme of work that meets our strategic ambitions and puts learners at the heart of our work.

3.3 Learner panels

As part of our commitment to engaging with learners and their parents and carers we have established a Learner Panel, with representation from learners in schools and colleges across Scotland, as well as young representatives from learner organisations. The Panel ensures the views of young people are fully heard.

Membership is from a range of learner organisations including the Scottish Youth Parliament, Carers Trust Scotland, SPARQS (college learners) as well as from individual school and college learners. SQA organised a number of panels, covering topics such as the Quality Assurance model for National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers, Learning Disruption and Appeals.

Following the first few meetings we engaged with the Scottish Youth Parliament, who have agreed to manage future panels on behalf of SQA, to ensure independence and that young people's voices are fully heard. Meetings are scheduled regularly and a programme of topic areas has been developed, in line with 2020-21 awarding activities and to reflect the issues that young people have told us they are concerned about – directly and through research feedback. We have worked with SYP to put in place a mechanism for agreeing the panel schedule, working with colleagues and partners to agree content areas and engagement methodology to be used at each session. This helps us to make the most of the collaborative engagement.

3.4 Pulse surveys

To ensure SQA remains informed of what learners think about important issues, we have set up groups so that we can undertake short pulse surveys. Currently, 1,000 learners have signed up to take part. In addition, 2,000 parents/carers and 350 practitioners are involved. We are also developing governance arrangements to ensure that the correct topics are covered in pulse surveys, while retaining the flexibility required to get a speedy turnaround.

The first pulse survey was issued to learners on 27 January 2021, to ask them about their experiences of using our website. Following the election in May, we are now looking to use this mechanism to obtain feedback from young people.

4. Next steps

The work outlined above is being progressed through two key strands of work:

4.1 2021 Learner engagement activities

The recent work we have undertaken with young people will continue, supporting 2021 activities and ongoing learner engagement and will be integrated and monitored as part of Communications and engagement planned activities. The primary focus areas will be:

- Learner focussed content and assets
- Learner panels and direct learner engagement
- Learner research and pulse surveys

4.2 Learner and parent/carer strategy

The overarching strategy for SQA's engagement with young people and their parents and carers will extend beyond 2021 and will become a key strand in the organisation's approach to stakeholder engagement.

Annex B

SYP produced a proposal outlining how they are delivering panels – the key outcomes and outputs are:

Outcomes:

- Young people will have a meaningful opportunity to share their views and opinions on crucial decisions that will affect them
- The SQA will get an accurate perspective of the views of young people from across Scotland on key issues, including from groups who might otherwise be hard to reach
- The SQA will be perceived as a trail-blazer in the area of young people's rights and participation, in advance of the likely implementation of the legislation that will incorporate the UNCRC into domestic law next year

Outputs:

- Recruit around ten young people for Learner Panel, including one or more Panel Chairs
- Convene monthly Learner Panel Meetings
- One short report after each Learner Panel, to be shared with SQA and published on SYP's website
- Meet monthly with SQA staff to present the report on each panel, to discuss feedback and agree topics for discussion at future learner panel meetings.
- Quarterly meetings with SQA senior team young people from the learner panel (as required).

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Enclosure 007.1, Attachment: FW: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments

From: UNDERSTUDY, SOS1 <SOS1.UNDERSTUDY@education.gov.uk>

Sent: 13 July 2021 12:35

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>

Cc: PS, Sec-OF-STATE <Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk>

Subject: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments

Dear Shirley-Anne,

Please find attached a letter from Secretary of State for Education, regarding 2021/22 qualifications and assessments in England.

Kind regards,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] to Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, Secretary of State for Education



Department
for Education

Enclosure 007.1 - Letter from Secretary of State

[Out of scope]

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Enclosure 008 - FW: LETTER FROM UKG SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION - QUALIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENTS

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 16 July 2021 10:22
To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Cc: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anon@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: LETTER FROM UKG SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION - QUALIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENTS

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Response issued – copy attached.

Could I ask that all responses are, in future, put on to letter template with full address added.

Many thanks.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

T: 0131 244 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | M: 07 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: cabsecES@gov.scot
The Scottish Government | St Andrew's House, Regent Road, EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

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From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Sent: 15 July 2021 07:27
To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Cc: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anon@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: LETTER FROM UKG SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION - QUALIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENTS

PS

Hope you are well this morning?

SC(xx)xx

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

I would suggest the following as reply. As confirmed yesterday this is more of a holding reply reflecting our current position. I would intend a more fulsome reply to Mr Williamson once Scottish arrangements are confirmed:

Dear Gavin Williamson,

Many thanks for your correspondence detailing qualification and assessment arrangements for session 2021/22 in England. I found it extremely helpful to see your latest thinking, including detail of subject level adaptations and the approach to formal assessments.

In Scotland, our approach for session 2021/22 continues to be developed.

With regards to course content, the Scottish Qualifications Agency issued subject specific guidelines in late June to teachers and lecturers. These confirmed the modifications to course content across subjects and levels.

In terms of formal assessment, the National Qualifications group, comprised of a range of educational stakeholders, are currently reviewing the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) used in session 2020-2021, with a view to identifying the best approach for the year ahead. Views are being sought from Parent/carer and learner groups to further inform our decisions.

It is my intention to confirm assessment arrangements for session 2021-2022 before centres re-open in mid-August. I will of course share details of these arrangements with you when confirmed.

I wish you lovely summer and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Thank you, have a lovely day

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Director of Learning

Sent: 13 July 2021 12:58

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

Cc: Pentland MK (Malcolm) <Malcolm.Pentland@gov.scot>; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>; McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>; DG Education & Justice <dgej@gov.scot>; Director of Learning <DirectorofLearning@gov.scot>; Director of Advanced Learning and Science <DirectorofAdvancedLearningandScience@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Gorman G (Gayle) <Gayle.Gorman@educationscotland.gov.scot>; Anson S (Sam) <Sam.Anson@gov.scot>

Subject: FW: LETTER FROM UKG SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION - QUALIFICATIONS & ASSESSMENTS

[Redacted s38(1)(b)],

In Malcolm's absence, please see attached.

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

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

Area: Currently working from home.

This chain diverges from Enclosure 015 at the email of 13 July 2021 12:56

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Enclosure 008.1 - Attachment: Email FW: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Sent: 16 July 2021 10:21
To: UNDERSTUDY, SOS1 <SOS1.UNDERSTUDY@education.gov.uk>; Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Cc: PS, Sec-OF-STATE <Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments

PS/Secretary of State

Please find attached a response from Shirley-Anne Somerville, Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills to the Secretary of State's letter.

Many thanks.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Private Secretary to Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills

T: 0131 244 [Redacted s38(1)(b)] | M: 07[Redacted s38(1)(b)] | E: cabsecES@gov.scot
The Scottish Government | St Andrew's House, Regent Road, EDINBURGH EH1 3DG

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From: UNDERSTUDY, SOS1 <SOS1.UNDERSTUDY@education.gov.uk>
Sent: 13 July 2021 12:35
To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>
Cc: PS, Sec-OF- STATE <Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk>
Subject: Update from Secretary of State on 2020/21 qualifications and assessments

Dear Shirley-Anne,

Please find attached a letter from Secretary of State for Education, regarding 2021/22 qualifications and assessments in England.

Kind regards,

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)] to Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP, Secretary of State for Education



Enclosure 008.2- Attachment:PDF

16 July 2021

Dear Gavin

[Out of scope] In Scotland, our approach for session 2021/22 continues to be developed.

With regards to course content, the Scottish Qualifications Agency issued subject specific guidelines in late June to teachers and lecturers. These confirmed the modifications to course content across subjects and levels.

In terms of formal assessment, the National Qualifications group, comprised of a range of educational stakeholders, are currently reviewing the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) used in session 2020-2021, with a view to identifying the best approach for the year ahead. Views are being sought from Parent/carer and learner groups to further inform our decisions.

It is my intention to confirm assessment arrangements for session 2021-2022 before centres re-open in mid-August. I will of course share details of these arrangements with you when confirmed.

Yours sincerely

Enclosure 009 - Attachment: Options Paper ACM 2022 for NQ WG 21

Paper for discussion on ACM 2022 for NQ Working Group 21st July, 2021.

Recap from 13th July 2021 Working Group discussion

A short recap on what was discussed and agreed last week: [redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Working Group discussion

It would be helpful to think around these models further. In the first place, it would be good to explore other advantages and disadvantages to these options, their workability; and in the second place, whether there are potential refinements to these options, and finally, exploring the group's preferences for an option.

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 010 - Attachment: Word Doc: Mr Hepburn briefing

OECD CFE REVIEW AND EDUCATION REFORM

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 011 - Attachment: Word Doc: Learning for Sustainability and STEM - Briefing

BRIEFING FOR THE MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND FURTHER EDUCATION, YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING

[Out of scope]

MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN CFE AND SENIOR PHASE ASSESSMENT

We await with interest the outcomes of the OECD's comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches, expected in the autumn.

- The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills confirmed on 22 June that the OECD will publish this by the end of August.

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012 - Attachment: Pdf Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.1 - Attachment: Pdf Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.2 -Attachment: Pdf Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.3 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.4 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.5 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.6 -Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.7 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.8 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 012.9 - Attachment: Word Doc

Out of Scope

7. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

The last two academic sessions have been challenging ones, for learners, parents, teachers and others across our education system, particularly in relation to the qualifications.

One key decision, in 2020-21 reflecting disruption to learning as a result of Covid-19, was that a normal diet of examinations could not go ahead. Decisions such as this have been led, and will continue to be led, by the science, informed by the views and concerns of stakeholders.

An Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was put in place for 2020-21, taking into account the disruption to learning and providing a flexible framework for schools and colleges to draw upon a range of assessment tools in arriving at provisional results for learners based on demonstrated attainment.

Taking into account recommendations from the National Qualifications experience 2020 rapid review, the ACM was arrived at through a collaborative approach. The National Qualifications 2021 Group, chaired by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), co-created the model and continue to monitor and oversee implementation. The Group draws its membership from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, the Scottish Government, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Provisional results were shared with learners by their centres in advance of the 25 June deadline for submission to SQA. In line with the manifesto commitments for the first 100 days of the new government, SQA are progressing with formal certification of these results which will take place as previously scheduled on 10 August.

In recognition of the ongoing disruption through May and into June in some parts of Scotland, a contingency arrangement was put in place for learners who had completed their courses but for whom, due to particularly significant disruption the required evidence demonstrating their attainment could not be gathered within the flexibilities already provided. A later submission date for provisional results of 3 September was agreed for these candidates.

For learners unhappy with their results, the 2021 appeals process opened on 25 June allowing a direct right of appeal. From that date, learners were able to indicate an intention to appeal, with the formal appeals process commencing once results are published on 10 August. The closing date for priority appeals is Tuesday 24 August, and for non-priority appeals is Friday 27 August.

Ongoing support has been provided to learners throughout the summer from various agencies.

Next Steps

- (1) Consultation with stakeholders, particularly with learners, parents and carers, is underway to inform decisions on the approach to the assessment of National Qualifications in 2022 in advance of the new academic session. SQA have already confirmed [modifications](#) for NQ subjects for 2021/2022;
- (2) Throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we will continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary to mitigate any further disruption for learners and the teaching/lecturer workforce whilst ensuring that fairness and credibility of the qualifications is maintained; and
- (3) We will work with partners to develop the future approach to assessment beyond 2022, informed by the OECD's report on comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches expected at the end of August.

Out of Scope

Enclosure 013 - Attachment: Word Doc: FE-HE and Students

Out of Scope

ADDITIONAL 'SQA' PLACES IN HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

We are responding to the potential impact of the changes to the SQA process last year and this year on students looking to undertake further and higher courses in Scotland in the new academic year.

- Through the Scottish Funding Council, we will continue to provide additional support to our institutions to ensure that students are able to take up places at university through the provision of additional places.
- For 2021-22 we will continue to fund the additional 1,297 places that were made available last year for students impacted by the SQA changes.
- We are also making provision for further additional places, currently estimated to be around 2,500 for new students, starting courses in the next academic year.
- **[Out Of Scope]**
- Both Government and the SFC will continue to work with colleges and universities to build a full understanding of the needs for 2021-22 and beyond.

Out of Scope

Enclosure 014 - Attachment: Word Doc

From: Malcolm Pentland

Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
04 August 2021

Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22

Purpose

1. To provide an update on a proposed approach for the assessment of the National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in the 2021-22 academic session, following further engagement with stakeholders.

Timing

2. **Urgent.** It was agreed that a decision on this matter would be announced prior to schools returning. More details on potential handling of an announcement is set out below.

Background

3. The Chief Examiner previously provided advice on the qualifications situation for 2021/22. In addition to this you asked officials to gather wider views, consider the issues and take account of the latest public health advice in order to inform a decision on plans the coming school year, which could be confirmed in advance of the new school term in August.

Stakeholder Views

4. Officials have engaged further with learners and parents and their representative organisations, and an overview of their views is outlined below. Due to timelines involved, engagement with learners and parents has run in parallel to the development of a proposed approach undertaken by SQA, working in collaboration with the National Qualifications 2021 (NQ21) Group. The learners and parents have, therefore, not been commenting on a specific proposal (although Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and National Parents Forum for Scotland (NPFS) are both represented on the NQ21 Group, so have been sighted on the developing proposal) but have been asked to comment more generally on their reflections from 2020/21 and the approach for next year. This engagement has also sought to address concerns about the extent of engagement of SYP and NPFS through the NQ21 Group by offering an alternative means for them to share their views.

Learners

5. We sought the views of learners through a number of channels. These included the SQA Learner Panel; SYP (including views from [Redacted S38(1)(b)] and views gathered during SYP learner engagement); Career Ready^[1] students within Scottish Government and Education Scotland; the final meeting of the Youth Panel (Young Scot) and also a meeting of the Pupil Council at Denny High School.

6. As may be expected, there was no clear consensus of what assessment arrangements in session 2021-2022 should look like. However, key messages did emerge across and within groups of learners:

Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

7. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

Parents

8. The views of parents on the approach for 2022 have been gathered through an online session set up with NPFS regional representatives, attended by an SG official, along with feedback captured at an internal NPFS discussion, which NPFS have shared:

Reflections on 2021

- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

Preferences for 2022

- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
- Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

National Qualifications Group

9. Over the summer period, the NQ21 Group has been giving further detailed consideration to a potential approach to the qualifications for the coming academic session, including contingencies. The Group is clear that demonstrated attainment should continue to form the basis of any approach to the qualifications in 2021-22 to ensure both fairness and validity.

10. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

^[1] A programme available to S5 learners aimed at developing employability skills

11. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
12. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
13. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
14. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
15. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)
16. Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

17. We understand that the Chief Examiner will write the Cabinet Secretary shortly to provide an update from the National Qualifications Group on these proposals for session 2021/2022.

Public Health Advice

18. Public health advice remains key to decision making in this area.

19. Officials have engaged with the Deputy Chief Medical Officer (DCMO) who has indicated that, from a clinical and public health perspective, and taking into account the uncertainties around the future course of Covid19, the proposals relating to exams look sensible and appropriate.

20. The sub-group on Education and Children's Issues chaired by Carol Tannahill (on which the DCMO sits) considers evidence from a rounded perspective and feeds into CERG. Its advice is approved by the CMO office and the Chair of the overarching C19 Advisory Group. Officials will continue to ensure that proposals reflect and take account of the sub-group's advice – with flexibility to reflect any future advice in the practical arrangements for exams.

21. Officials will continue to monitor the position and any ongoing disruption to learning, although it is anticipated that Redacted - s.30(b)(ii)

OECD Review/Future Transformation

22. Out of scope
23. Out of Scope
24. Out of Scope

Legal Advice

25. [Redacted – Section 36 (1)]
26. [Redacted – Section 36 (1)]

27. [Redacted – Section 36 (1)]

Equality and Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments

28. As was the case for 2020 and 2021, officials will need to carry out a full Equality Impact Assessment and Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment in relation to the Scottish Government’s policy on the model for the award of national qualifications in 2021-22.

29. In addition, in exercising its functions, the SQA is also subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty and, as a public authority, it is subject to the same constraints as Ministers (mentioned in paragraph 25), as well as in compliance with the Convention rights. Subject to the outcome of the reference by the UK Government’s Law Officers to the Supreme Court, the provisions of the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill would apply to both Ministers and the SQA from the time it is commenced, which might conceivably be within school year 2021/22. The implications of that for Ministers would have to be assessed further once the outcome is known, and the SQA will wish to do the same.

rUK Position

30. In the rest of the UK:

- England have confirmed that they plan to go ahead with an exam diet in 2022 with possible modifications to take account of disruption.
- Wales officials have advised that GCSE, AS and A level qualifications will be assessed via exams and non-examination assessments as normal, but reflecting adaptations, in summer 2022. Alternative arrangements will be put in place in case there is further significant impact on teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic.
- On 17 May, Northern Ireland announced their intention to proceed with exams in 2022, with adaptations and a reduced number of exams. It was confirmed that there would also be contingency arrangements for alternative awarding based on centre professional judgement if required.

Advice

31. [Redacted – Section 30 (b) (ii)]

32. [Redacted – Section 30 (b) (ii)]

33. [Redacted – Section 30 (b) (ii)]

34. [Redacted – Section 30 (b) (ii)]

Handling strategy for announcement

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

35. Officials have been exploring options for an announcement, subject to your views, that would set out the headline approach to assessment of national qualifications and confirm that further detailed planning is being taken forward through the NQ21 Group over the coming weeks.

36. You have publicly committed to making an announcement on this before schools return and we have engaged with special adviser colleagues on this. A relatively small number of schools begin to return from Monday 9th (Western Isles) and Tuesday 10th August (Angus, Orkney and some in East Dunbartonshire) but staff only for in-service days. The first pupils to return are in Angus on Wednesday 11th August, with schools in other LAs returning at various points between the 12th and 19th August.

37. Given that the SQA results are published on 10th August, we recommend making an announcement the following day, Wednesday 11 August. This option is favoured by SpAds. Communications colleagues will prepare a news release and social content (with lines to take for reactive queries). This would be after some teachers return to school for in-service days but before pupils do in every authority area other than Angus. It would be on the same day pupils return to Angus schools.

38. Subject to your being content with the general approach, officials will prepare a SCANCE note for Cabinet on Tuesday 10th August and a GIQ to inform Parliament. A draft note from you to the First Minister, updating her on this, is provided at **Annex A** for your consideration.

39. Officials will prepare background briefing ahead of any announcement. Officials will also engage further with SQA and stakeholders to develop more detail on the 'trigger points' for the gear-change model, and the guidance needed to support schools in understanding the assessment requirements under any move to the third 'gear'.

Recommendation and Conclusion

40. You are invited to:

- a) note the identified proposed option for approaching the assessment of graded national courses in the 2021-22 academic session, and indicate if you are content with this approach;
- b) note the suggested handling strategy for making the announcement, and indicate if you are content; and
- c) indicate whether you are content for the draft note at Annex A to be sent to FM.

Malcolm Pentland

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Curriculum, Qualifications & Gaelic Division
04 August 2021

Annex A: Draft Note for Cabinet Secretary to send to FM

[Redacted – Section 29 (1) (b)]

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Copy List:	For Action	For Comments	For Information		
			Portfolio Interest	Constit Interest	General Awareness
Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training			x		
Permanent Secretary DG Education and Justice Director of Learning Director of Advanced Learning and Science Gayle Gorman Ollie Bray Sam Anson Mick Wilson Andy Drought Liza McLean Alison Taylor [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)] Roddy Macdonald Linda Pooley [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Denise McKay [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Comms Education [Redacted s38(1)(b)] [Redacted s38(1)(b)] Colin McAllister					

Enclosure 015 - Attachment: Word Doc- Exam Diet 2021 – Briefing

Out of scope

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of scope

Enclosure 016-Attachment: Word Doc: Exam Diet 2021 – Briefing – Ministerial Submission 01

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 017 - Attachment: Word Doc: Results Day Narrative 2021 Draft

[Out of scope]

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

Enclosure 018 - Attachment: Email: FW: FOR CLEARANCE: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams – Herald

From: McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>
Sent: 06 August 2021 16:30
To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Ingebrigtsen R (Ross) <Ross.Ingebrigtsen@gov.scot>; Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@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)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams - Herald

Ok

Regards

Colin McAllister
0131 244 3248
07557 744868



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

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Sent: 06 August 2021 16:29
To: McAllister C (Colin) <Colin.McAllister@gov.scot>
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Ingebrigtsen R (Ross) <Ross.Ingebrigtsen@gov.scot>; Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@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)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams - Herald

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

Hi Colin – are you content for me to send this line to Mr Hepburn for clearance?

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Sent: 06 August 2021 16:27

SC(xx)xx

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Ingebrigtsen R (Ross) <Ross.Ingebrigtsen@gov.scot>; Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@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)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams - Herald

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Content with lines with one suggested addition.

“The Alternative Certification Model, developed in collaboration with the National Qualifications 2021 Group, was designed ~~developed~~ to deliver fair, credible consistent results, our young people and our teachers have worked so hard for.

“This year’s provisional grades are based on teacher judgement of learners’ demonstrated attainment. Teachers were supported nationally and locally to deliver the model in flexible ways whilst ensuring the grades are fair and robust.

“Learners who remain unhappy with their results can register an appeal directly with the SQA.”

Best regards
[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Sent: 06 August 2021 16:13
To: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Cc: News Desk <Newsdesk@gov.scot>; Communications Education & Skills <CommunicationsEducation&Skills@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>; Ingebrigtsen R (Ross) <Ross.Ingebrigtsen@gov.scot>; Mackintosh E (Emily) <Emily.Mackintosh@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)]@gov.scot>; [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@gov.scot>
Subject: Media query - immediate - SQA op ed on exams - Herald

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

The Herald has a query - the section highlighted in yellow - about the attached op ed from SQA’s Fiona Robertson.

The reporter has asked if we wish to provide comment?

My view is to go with the line copied below that we developed earlier for the Sunday Post query.

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]
[Redacted s38(1)(b)]
Communications Education

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The Scottish Government
07[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training Jamie Hepburn said:

“The Alternative Certification Model was developed to deliver fair, credible consistent results, our young people and our teachers have worked so hard for.

“This year’s provisional grades are based on teacher judgement of learners’ demonstrated attainment. Teachers were supported nationally and locally to deliver the model in flexible ways whilst ensuring the grades are fair and robust.

“Learners who remain unhappy with their results can register an appeal directly with the SQA.”

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]@newsquest.co.uk>

Sent: 06 August 2021 15:15

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

Subject: Media query

Hi [Redacted s38(1)(b)]

Good talking with you there.

This is to confirm my request for an indication on when we can expect the Education Secretary to make a statement to parliament about the 2022 exams. (We were told previously this would be made by the start of the new school year.)

Also, we’re running a news piece alongside the attached op-ed from the SQA’s Fiona Robertson (both to run alongside each other on Monday). The reaction expresses some frustration at the idea that ACM was the best possible solution and that there was no credible alternative put forward. Is this something Scot Gov would want to provide comment on?

Feel free to ring on 07[Redacted s38(1)(b)].

Many thanks

[Redacted s38(1)(b)]

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Enclosure 019 - Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 – Advice to Cab Sec

As per Enclosure 14 – Enclosure 19 is the same content.

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Enclosure 020 - Attachment: Word Doc: Assessment 2022 – Ministerial Submission

From: [Redacted s38(1)(b)]
Learning Directorate
August 2021

To: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills

ASSESSMENT MODEL FOR SESSION 2021/2022 - GOVERNMENT INITIATED QUESTION

Purpose

1. To seek your approval for a Government Initiated Question (GIQ) to make public the decision to hold examinations for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in session 2021/2022.

Priority

2. **IMMEDIATE** – following discussion with special advisers it is suggested that a GIQ be lodged for answer on Wednesday 11 August.

Background

3. On 4 August 2021 Malcolm Pentland submitted to you a submission on the approach to assessing National Qualifications in 2021/22. Within this submission was a suggestion that a GIQ could be used to inform Parliament of the arrangements should Cabinet Secretary be content with the proposed approach.

Timing

4. Following discussion with special advisers, it is suggested that the GIQ should be lodged for answer on Wednesday 11 August.
5. I am currently checking timing for the lodging of the GIQ with Parliamentary Clerks and will confirm details with PO when known.

Recommendation

6. The Cabinet Secretary is invited to:
 - Approve the GIQ as set out in Annex A to this this submission and to nominate an MSP to lodge the question; and
 - Agree the proposed timescale to answering the GIQ.

**GOVERNMENT INITIATED QUESTION: ACADEMIC SESSION 2021/2022
ASSESSMENT**

QUESTION

“To ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to provide an update on the assessment plans for National 5/Higher and Advanced Higher courses in session 2021/2022”

ANSWER

I can confirm that the central planning assumption is that an examination diet for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be held in session 2021/2022.

My decision has been informed by the views of stakeholders, including the National Qualifications Group, and by public health advice.

Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA.

However, I can reassure Parliament that careful contingency planning is underway should there be further significant disruption to learning and teaching and, or public health conditions that do not allow for the holding of an examination diet. That planning is being done at pace by the National Qualifications Group, which has met frequently over the summer to consider options for the coming session. It will issue detailed guidance at the earliest opportunity.

Enclosure 021 - Attachment: Word Doc: Exam Diet 2021 – Briefing

Out of Scope

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of Scope

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Enclosure 035.1, Attachment: Word Doc

Enclosure 022.1 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 022.2 -Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 022.3 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 022.4 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 023 - Attachment: Word Doc –NQ – Results Day 10 Aug – Briefing

Out of scope

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of scope

Out of scope

Enclosure 023.1 -Attachment: Word Doc – Core Narrative

Out of scope

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of scope

Enclosure 024 - Attachment: Word Doc - NQ – Results Days 10 Aug

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 024.1 Attachment: Word Doc – Core Narrative

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 025 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 026 Attachment: Word Doc

RESULTS DAY NARRATIVE

Out of scope

2022 Qualifications and Future of Assessment

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of scope

Enclosure 027 -Attachment: Word Doc

RESULTS DAY NARRATIVE

Out of scope

2022 Qualifications and Future of Assessment

When will an announcement be made on next year's qualifications? Will exams go ahead next year?

- An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.
- As always, the safety, wellbeing and education of our young people will be the top priority.

Out of scope

Enclosure 027.1 - Attachment: Word Doc

[Out of scope]

***Enclosure 028 - Attachment: Cab Sec ES to First Minister – School Exams
2021-2022***

[Redacted - withheld on basis of section 29 (1) (b) of FOI]

Enclosure 029 - Attachment: Word Doc

Out of scope

5. Members of the Education Recovery Strategy Sub-Group previously agreed that the document should consist of the following short chapters:

- Overview
- ELC
- Health and Wellbeing
- Supporting Learning and Attainment
- Ensuring Equity
- Additional Support Needs
- National Qualifications
- Supporting Positive Destinations for Children and Young People
- Higher and Further Education
- Supporting the Workforce
- Summary and Next Steps

Out of scope

Enclosure 029.1 - Attachment: Word Doc

Education Recovery Strategy

- Building a collaborative and pandemic-proof system to support excellence and equity

Out of scope

7. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

[Out of scope]

Work has been undertaken by the NQ21 Group over the summer to develop plans for the 2021/2022 academic session. Consultation with stakeholders, particularly learners and parents, has also informed decisions on the approach to the assessment of National Qualifications in 2022 which were announced on 11 August.

The central planning assumption will be for examinations to proceed in 2022 for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, with [modifications for NQ subjects confirmed by SQA prior to the summer break](#).

In the event that additional disruption is experienced, additional adaptations to the exams will be considered. These may include adaptations to the content of the papers, such as the removal of certain content, or an indication to learners of the topics to be covered, through to the physical arrangements for sitting the papers, such as the use of multiple classrooms rather than assembly or gym halls, if public health advice advises certain approaches to large gatherings.

A further contingency arrangement will be in place for the possibility of more significant disruption, and with it public health advice advising against large gatherings of people, which would lead to the cancellation of exams – such as we have seen in the past two academic sessions. In this case, we will look to draw on planned assessments gathered at appropriate times throughout the year. Guidance on this arrangement will be provided at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the volume and gathering of evidence is robust, reliable and proportionate.

Next Steps

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- (1) Throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we will continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary to mitigate any further disruption for learners and the teaching/lecturer workforce whilst ensuring that fairness and credibility of the qualifications is maintained; and
- (2) We will work with partners to develop the future approach to assessment beyond 2022, informed by the OECD's report on comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches expected at the end of August.

Out of scope

Enclosure 030 - Attachment: Word Doc – Briefing Pack

ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR NATIONAL COURSES IN 2021/22

Background

Advice from officials on 4 August provided an update on a proposed approach for the assessment of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in the 2021-22 academic year that has been developed by the SQA in collaboration with the National Qualifications Group. On 6 August, the Chief Examining Officer wrote to you also outlining the proposed approach (detail on approach provided below).

On 10 August you indicated that you were content with assessment proposals and for a headline announcement to be made on 11 August, with a GIQ being answered and a news release issuing.

The plan is that the GIQ (attached at Annex A) is lodged at 1100 on 11 August with a news release issuing at approximately 1130 confirming the central planning assumption for 2021/22 being the delivery of an exam diet with the already announced modifications take place but with contingencies developed for deploying if later required.

The NQ Group will then issue its own communication providing more detail on the contingencies - in the shape of further modifications/adaptations should the level of disruption increase, and, in a scenario where the diet had to be cancelled, the use of in-year assessment evidence (demonstrated attainment) to support teacher judged grades. A draft of the NQ Group communication (which would be issued by SQA) is attached at Annex B.

Detail

Development of arrangements

- Over the summer period, the NQ21 Group has been giving further detailed consideration to a potential approach to the qualifications for the coming academic session, including contingencies.
- Creation of the assessment approach has been informed by experiences in session 2020/2021.
- The Group is clear that demonstrated attainment should continue to form the basis of any approach to the qualifications in 2021-22 to ensure both fairness and validity.
- Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA.

Detail of modifications

- Subject level modifications to assessment equate to reducing the expected course content by around 20% compared to a normal year. This reduction in course content, coupled with a reduction in assessment burden in almost all subject areas, should allow for a greater focus on learning and teaching.

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

- These existing modifications have been designed to create more flexibility to absorb some of the impact of disrupted learning, free up teachers and learners from some of the demands of the course, whilst having relatively minimal impacts upon validity and reliability.
- NQ21 has identified a preferred “gear change model” [formal name still to be confirmed] to include mitigations to offset any further disruption to learning whether through self-isolation or future lockdowns, and any public health conditions impacting on delivery of an exam diet.
- This model includes a set of contingencies, with a clear understanding of when we would shift to a different plan, and under what conditions, is still to be developed at pace by the National Qualifications Group, which has met frequently over the summer to consider options for the coming session. It will issue detailed guidance at the earliest opportunity.
- The intent would be to have three stages or gears to the contingency as follows:
 - (a) operate an exam diet with already announced modifications, and,
 - (b) if some degree of additional disruption is experienced, to insulate examinations against further disruption with further adaptation/modification to increase accessibility, decrease stress on learners etc – e.g. Advance Notice of Topic Areas for revision purposes, more use of Open Book etc.
 - (c) in the event that examinations become impossible because of public health restrictions / lockdown, then in-year assessment evidence will be used to support teacher judged grades.
- Any approach for the 2022 qualifications, will be based purely on ongoing effects of Covid-19, such as significant disruption to learning, and/or public health grounds.

[Out of Scope]

rUK

- England have confirmed that they plan to go ahead with an exam diet in 2022 with possible modifications to take account of disruption.
- Wales officials have advised that GCSE, AS and A level qualifications will be assessed via exams and non-examination assessments as normal, but reflecting adaptations, in summer 2022. Alternative arrangements will be put in place in case there is further significant impact on teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic.
- On 17 May, Northern Ireland announced their intention to proceed with exams in 2022, with adaptations and a reduced number of exams. It was confirmed that there would also be contingency arrangements for alternative awarding based on centre professional judgement if required.

Q&A

Who have you consulted?

- Over the summer period, the NQ21 Group has been giving further detailed consideration to a potential approach to the qualifications for the coming academic session, including contingencies.
- I've listened closely to what young people and their parents have been saying and my officials have engaged further with learners and parents and their representative organisations
- Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and National Parents Forum for Scotland (NPFS) are both represented on the NQ21 Group
- We sought the views of learners through a number of channels. These included the SQA Learner Panel; SYP; Career Ready^[1] students within Scottish Government and Education Scotland; the final meeting of the Youth Panel (Young Scot) and also a meeting of the Pupil Council.
- The views of parents on the approach for 2022 have been gathered through an online session set up with NPFS regional representatives, attended by an SG official, along with feedback captured at an internal NPFS discussion, which NPFS have shared:

Why go back to exams? OECD reform – why go back?

- Any approach for the 2022 qualifications, will be based purely on ongoing effects of Covid-19, such as significant disruption to learning, and/or public health grounds.
- Decisions on the 2021/22 academic session are not an indication of any future direction for the qualifications which will be considered separately after due consultation.
- The recent OECD report made clear that Scotland needs assessment methods that better align with the aims of Curriculum for Excellence.
- Over the coming months, we will work to do that and we will be seeking views from across all shades of opinion to inform that work. This is, therefore, a welcome contribution to the debate that the OECD report sparked on the future of the awards system.

How to avoid over-assessment / stress / workload

- Subject level modifications to assessment equate to reducing the expected course content by around 20% compared to a normal year.
- This reduction in course content, coupled with a reduction in assessment burden in almost all subject areas, should allow for a greater focus on learning and teaching.
- From the start of the course and throughout session 2021-22, teachers and lecturers should gather examples of learners' work and keep a record of any normal, planned assessments that take place. This will provide a reliable collection of evidence that can be used to determine learners' grades if the exams are cancelled.
- To avoid increased assessment and additional workload, it is important that the evidence gathered is based only on planned work that learners will already be

[1] A programme available to S5 learners aimed at developing employability skills

doing throughout the course. There is no need to carry out additional assessments. We will provide all schools, colleges and training providers with more detailed information and guidance on our contingency arrangements for the 2022 exams.

When would mitigations come into effect?

- Public health advice remains key to decision making in this area.
- The National Qualifications Group will be setting out more detail on the a set of contingencies very soon.
- We will continue to monitor the position and any ongoing disruption to learning, although it is anticipated that the approach developed provides the flexibility to adapt to any significant levels of disruption.

What are the other nations doing?

Currently in the rest of the UK:

- England have confirmed that they plan to go ahead with an exam diet in 2022 with possible modifications to take account of disruption.
- Wales officials have advised that GCSE, AS and A level qualifications will be assessed via exams and non-examination assessments as normal, but reflecting adaptations, in summer 2022. Alternative arrangements will be put in place in case there is further significant impact on teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic.
- On 17 May, Northern Ireland announced their intention to proceed with exams in 2022, with adaptations and a reduced number of exams. It was confirmed that there would also be contingency arrangements for alternative awarding based on centre professional judgement if required.

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ASSESSMENT
QUESTION**

“To ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to provide an update on the assessment plans for National 5/Higher and Advanced Higher courses in session 2021/2022”

ANSWER

I can confirm that the central planning assumption is that an examination diet for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be held in session 2021/2022.

My decision has been informed by the views of stakeholders, including the National Qualifications Group, and by public health advice.

Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA.

However, I can reassure Parliament that careful contingency planning is underway should there be further significant disruption to learning and teaching and, or public health conditions that do not allow for the holding of an examination diet. That planning is being done at pace by the National Qualifications Group, which has met frequently over the summer to consider options for the coming session. It will issue detailed guidance at the earliest opportunity.

Annex B

- **National Qualifications in session 2021-22**

Response from the National Qualifications Group

Today, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills has confirmed plans to hold exams for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in session 2021-22. Addressing the Scottish Parliament, the Cabinet Secretary said, [insert statement]. The **National Qualifications Group*** will continue to support the delivery of National Qualifications in session 2021-22.

Planning for further disruption

While we are planning for exams to take place in 2022, it is important that we also plan for any additional disruption that may happen during session 2021-22. We are preparing robust contingency arrangements to respond to all scenarios and avoid a sudden change of plan if the public health situation changes. This includes looking at what further support measures could be put in place to ensure, as much as possible, that the 2022 exams can still go ahead.

However, if there is significant disruption, where public health advice no longer permits large gatherings of people, it is possible that this could lead to the 2022 exams being cancelled. If this happens, we will ask teachers and lecturers to use their professional judgement to determine learners' grades, based on work that learners have already completed throughout the course.

To prepare for this scenario, from the start of the course and throughout session 2021-22, teachers and lecturers should gather examples of learners' work and keep a record of any normal, planned assessments that take place. This will provide a reliable collection of evidence that can be used to determine learners' grades if the exams are cancelled.

To avoid increased assessment and additional workload, it is important that the evidence gathered is based only on planned work that learners will already be doing throughout the course. There is no need to carry out additional assessments. We will provide all schools, colleges and training providers with more detailed information and guidance on our contingency arrangements for the 2022 exams.

Modified course assessments 2021-22

SQA has modified the course assessment requirements for each National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course, to reduce the volume of assessment and to ease teacher, lecturer and learner workload as much as possible, while still maintaining the credibility of the qualifications. This will allow for any lost learning caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and will support learners as they progress to the next stage of their qualifications.

For most courses, these are the same modifications that were put in place for session 2020-21. For some courses, SQA has adjusted the modifications to give learners more opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, in response to feedback from teachers and lecturers and the easing of public health restrictions.

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In June, SQA published a brief overview of the modifications for each subject, which you can view by visiting www.sqa.org.uk/nqsubjects, selecting a subject, and clicking on the 'course information 2021-22' tab.

From Monday 16 August, SQA will publish 'modification summary documents' that provide more detail on these modifications and explain the assessment requirements for this year. This will help teachers and lecturers to prepare their learners for assessment.

We look forward to working with and supporting the whole education system to deliver National Qualifications for Scotland's learners.

The National Qualifications Group

*The **National Qualifications Group** consists of representatives of the following organisations:

- Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES)
- Colleges Scotland
- Education Scotland
- Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)
- National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS)
- School Leaders Scotland (SLS)
- Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS)
- Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
- Scottish Government
- Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP)

-ENDS-

Enclosure 031 - Attachment: Word doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 031.2 - Attachment: Word doc

CERG - weekly feedback

Out of scope

GTCS

Queries and concerns from teacher and lecturers about transition arrangements from the start of session to whatever the new plans will be in relation particularly to the support and expectations around about exams. There is an acceptance (and expectation) that something different will happen but a need for information in relation to likely speed of any change and what that means for the provision of education now.

We recognise these understandable concerns. An announcement on plans for 2022 will be made soon.

Out of scope

Enclosure 031.3 Attachment: Word doc

EDUCATION RECOVERY STRATEGY

Out of scope

7. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

[Out of scope]

Work has been undertaken by the NQ21 Group over the summer to develop plans for the 2021/2022 academic session. Consultation with stakeholders, particularly learners and parents, has also informed decisions on the approach to the assessment of National Qualifications in 2022 which were announced on 11 August.

The central planning assumption will be for examinations to proceed in 2022 for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, with [modifications for NQ subjects confirmed by SQA prior to the summer break](#).

In the event that additional disruption is experienced, additional adaptations to the exams will be considered. These may include adaptations to the content of the papers, such as the removal of certain content, or an indication to learners of the topics to be covered, through to the physical arrangements for sitting the papers, such as the use of multiple classrooms rather than assembly or gym halls, if public health advice advises certain approaches to large gatherings.

A further contingency arrangement will be in place for the possibility of more significant disruption, and with it public health advice advising against large gatherings of people, which would lead to the cancellation of exams – such as we have seen in the past two academic sessions. In this case, we will look to draw on planned assessments gathered at appropriate times throughout the year. Guidance on this arrangement will be provided at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the volume and gathering of evidence is robust, reliable and proportionate.

Next Steps

(1) Throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we will continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary to mitigate any further disruption for learners and the teaching/lecturer workforce whilst ensuring that fairness and credibility of the qualifications is maintained; and

(2) We will work with partners to develop the future approach to assessment beyond 2022, informed by the OECD's report on comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches expected at the end of August.

Out of scope

Enclosure 031.4 - Attachment: PDF doc

[Out of scope]

Enclosure 032 - Attachment: Word Doc

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

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Enclosure 033 - Attachment: Word Doc

Enclosure 034 - Attachment: Word Doc

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 035 - Attachment: SAS_edit_ QUALIFICATIONS 2022 Cabinet Paper

[Redacted - s.30(b)(ii) and section 29(1)]

Enclosure 036 - Attachment: Word Doc

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 036.1- Attachment: Word Doc

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 037 - Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 038 -Attachment: Word Doc: Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 039 Attachment: Word Doc Qualifications 2022 Cabinet Paper – 17 Aug

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 040- Attachment: Word Doc

Out of scope

2022 QUALIFICATIONS AND FUTURE OF ASSESSMENT

We will advise our central planning assumption for awarding qualifications in 2022 as soon as possible, taking account of the latest state of the pandemic.

- We know that learners, teachers and lecturers are keen to understand how qualifications will be awarded in 2022.
- Work has been undertaken by the National Qualifications Group over the summer to develop plans for the 2021/22 academic session, and consultation has also been carried out with learners and parents.
- We are giving this careful consideration taking on board, reflecting on, and learning from, the on-going experience of this year, and informed by public health advice.

Any decision on the 2022 approach is not an indication of any future direction for the qualifications which will be considered separately after due consultation.

- Any revised or new system of qualifications, will need to be informed by the outcomes from the OECD comparative research on assessment and qualifications that is due to publish at the end of this month, along with full stakeholder engagement.
- Whilst alternative approaches were adopted in 2020 and 2021, these were temporary, emergency measures in response to the pandemic.
- Any major reform of the qualifications system will likely take at least three years to develop and fully implement.

Out of scope

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***Enclosure 041- Attachment: FW: Cabinet: 17 August: Cabinet Paper:
ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS 2021/22***

***Enclosure 042 Attachment: Qualification 2022 Cabinet Paper – 17 Aug –
Speaking Note***

[redacted s.30(b)(ii)]

Enclosure 043 - Attachment: Word Doc

GIQ – Wednesday

QUESTION

“To ask the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to provide an update on the assessment plans for National 5/Higher and Advanced Higher courses in session 2021/2022”

ANSWER

I can confirm that the central planning assumption is that an examination diet for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses will be held in session 2021/2022.

My decision has been informed by the views of stakeholders, including the National Qualifications Group, and by public health advice.

Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA. **These modifications reduce the expected course content compared to a normal year, in recognition of the disruption learners have experienced. Fairness for learners sitting exams in 2022 is a central concern for me. We will set out details on further support available for learners, particularly those living in poverty, in September.**

I can reassure Parliament that careful contingency planning is underway should there be further significant disruption to learning and teaching and, or public health conditions that do not allow for the holding of an examination diet. That planning is being done at pace by the National Qualifications Group, which has met frequently over the summer to consider options for the coming session. It will issue detailed guidance at the earliest opportunity.

Enclosure 044 - Attachment: Word Doc

Education Recovery: Key Actions and Next Steps

Out of scope

7. NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS

[Out of scope]

[FINAL TEXT ON NQ 22 TO BE CONFIRMED]

Next Steps

In addition to the work set out above, we will take the following key next steps to ensure our approach to national qualifications and assessment is robust and resilient, and supports recovery from the impacts of COVID-19:

- (1) Throughout the remainder of 2021 and into 2022, we will continue to monitor the approach to National Qualifications, taking action and implementing any contingencies if necessary to mitigate any further disruption for learners and the teaching/lecturer workforce whilst ensuring that fairness and credibility of the qualifications is maintained;
- (2) Fairness for learners sitting exams in 2022 is a central concern. We will set out details on further support available for learners in September; and
- (3) We will work with partners to develop the future approach to assessment beyond 2022, informed by the OECD's report on comparative analysis of assessment and qualifications approaches expected at the end of August.

Out of scope

Enclosure 045 - Attachment: ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS 2022

ASSESSMENT ARRANGEMENTS FOR NATIONAL COURSES IN 2021/22

Background

Advice from officials on 4 August provided an update on a proposed approach for the assessment of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses in the 2021-22 academic year that has been developed by the SQA in collaboration with the National Qualifications Group. On 6 August, the Chief Examining Officer wrote to you also outlining the proposed approach (detail on approach provided below).

On 10 August you indicated that you were content with assessment proposals.

Following a request from the First Minister for further information, Cabinet approved the proposals on 17 August.

The plan is that the GIQ (attached at Annex A) is lodged at 9:30 on 18 August with a news release issuing at approximately 10:00 confirming the central planning assumption for 2021/22 being the delivery of an exam diet with the already announced modifications take place but with contingencies developed for deploying if later required.

The NQ Group will then issue its own communication providing more detail on the contingencies - in the shape of further modifications/adaptations should the level of disruption increase, and, in a scenario where the diet had to be cancelled, the use of in-year assessment evidence (demonstrated attainment) to support teacher judged grades.

Detail

Development of arrangements

- Over the summer period, the NQ21 Group has been giving further detailed consideration to a potential approach to the qualifications for the coming academic session, including contingencies.
- Creation of the assessment approach has been informed by experiences in session 2020/2021.
- The Group is clear that demonstrated attainment should continue to form the basis of any approach to the qualifications in 2021-22 to ensure both fairness and validity.
- Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA.

Detail of modifications

- Subject level modifications to assessment equate to reducing the expected course content by around 20% compared to a normal year. This reduction in course content, coupled with a reduction in assessment burden in almost all subject areas, should allow for a greater focus on learning and teaching.

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- These existing modifications have been designed to create more flexibility to absorb some of the impact of disrupted learning, free up teachers and learners from some of the demands of the course, whilst having relatively minimal impacts upon validity and reliability.
- NQ21 has identified a preferred model to include mitigations to offset any further disruption to learning whether through self-isolation or future lockdowns, and any public health conditions impacting on delivery of an exam diet.
- This model includes a set of contingencies, with a clear understanding of when we would shift to a different plan, and under what conditions, is still to be developed at pace by the National Qualifications Group, which has met frequently over the summer to consider options for the coming session. It will issue detailed guidance at the earliest opportunity.
- The intent would be to have three stages to the contingency as follows:
 - (a) operate an exam diet with already announced modifications, and,
 - (b) if some degree of additional disruption is experienced, to insulate examinations against further disruption with further adaptation/modification to increase accessibility, decrease stress on learners etc – e.g. Advance Notice of Topic Areas for revision purposes, more use of Open Book etc.
 - (c) in the event that examinations become impossible because of public health restrictions / lockdown, then in-year assessment evidence will be used to support teacher judged grades.
- Fairness for learners sitting exams in 2022 is a central concern. Further support that will be available for learners will be issued in September.
- Any approach for the 2022 qualifications, will be based purely on ongoing effects of Covid-19, such as significant disruption to learning, and/or public health grounds. Decisions on the 2021/22 academic session are not an indication of any future direction for the qualifications which will be considered separately after due consultation.

Future reform

- Any revised or new system of qualifications, will need to be informed by the outcomes from the OECD comparative research on assessment and qualifications, along with full stakeholder engagement – with any major reform of the qualifications system likely take at least three years to develop and fully implement.

rUK

- England have confirmed that they plan to go ahead with an exam diet in 2022 with possible modifications to take account of disruption.
- Wales officials have advised that GCSE, AS and A level qualifications will be assessed via exams and non-examination assessments as normal, but reflecting adaptations, in summer 2022. Alternative arrangements will be put in place in case there is further significant impact on teaching and learning as a result of the pandemic.
- On 17 May, Northern Ireland announced their intention to proceed with exams in 2022, with adaptations and a reduced number of exams. It was confirmed that there would also be contingency arrangements for alternative awarding based on centre professional judgement if required.

Q&A

Who have you consulted?

- Over the summer period, the NQ21 Group has been giving further detailed consideration to a potential approach to the qualifications for the coming academic session, including contingencies.
- I've listened closely to what young people and their parents have been saying and my officials have engaged further with learners and parents and their representative organisations
- Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) and National Parents Forum for Scotland (NPFS) are both represented on the NQ21 Group
- We sought the views of learners through a number of channels. These included the SQA Learner Panel; SYP; Career Ready^[1] students within Scottish Government and Education Scotland; the final meeting of the Youth Panel (Young Scot) and also a meeting of the Pupil Council.
- The views of parents on the approach for 2022 have been gathered through an online session set up with NPFS regional representatives, attended by an SG official, along with feedback captured at an internal NPFS discussion, which NPFS have shared:

How will learners be supported?

- We will meet with Education Scotland urgently (initial meeting scheduled for Friday 20 August at 9am), to discuss a support package. This could include study support sessions, increasing the e-sgoil/ national e-learning offer, Easter revision classes and how the attainment advisors could be deployed to support learners living in poverty sitting exams in 2022.
- We will also discuss how we can ensure that the £215m SAC funding for this year supports learners ahead of the exam diet, including the possibility of engaging with local authority officers and head teachers on these issues, through ES.
- We will meet with SQA to discuss further the mitigations/ adaptations to exams and further comms through the NQ group on the contingency plan.
- The possible contents of the support package will be discussed with stakeholders, including young people, and at the forthcoming meetings of the Scottish Education Council and Children and Young People's Education Council.

Why go back to exams? OECD reform – why go back?

- Any approach for the 2022 qualifications, will be based purely on ongoing effects of Covid-19, such as significant disruption to learning, and/or public health grounds.
- Decisions on the 2021/22 academic session are not an indication of any future direction for the qualifications which will be considered separately after due consultation.
- The recent OECD report made clear that Scotland needs assessment methods that better align with the aims of Curriculum for Excellence.

^[1] A programme available to S5 learners aimed at developing employability skills

- Over the coming months, we will work to do that and we will be seeking views from across all shades of opinion to inform that work. This is, therefore, a welcome contribution to the debate that the OECD report sparked on the future of the awards system.

How to avoid over-assessment / stress / workload

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- This reduction in course content, coupled with a reduction in assessment burden in almost all subject areas, should allow for a greater focus on learning and teaching.
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- To avoid increased assessment and additional workload, it is important that the evidence gathered is based only on planned work that learners will already be doing throughout the course. There is no need to carry out additional assessments. We will provide all schools, colleges and training providers with more detailed information and guidance on our contingency arrangements for the 2022 exams.

When would mitigations come into effect?

- Public health advice remains key to decision making in this area.
- The National Qualifications Group will be setting out more detail on the a set of contingencies very soon.
- We will continue to monitor the position and any ongoing disruption to learning, although it is anticipated that the approach developed provides the flexibility to adapt to any significant levels of disruption.

What are the other nations doing?

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Assessment modifications across National courses for the next academic session have already been confirmed by the SQA. These modifications reduce the expected course content compared to a normal year, in recognition of the disruption learners have experienced. Fairness for learners sitting exams in 2022 is a central concern for me. We will set out details on further support available for learners in September.

I can also confirm that careful contingency planning has taken place to ensure there is sufficient flexibility to respond to two key scenarios that might be faced as a result of the pandemic. First, in circumstances where there was further significant disruption to learning and teaching, a further round of modifications would be introduced in order to ease assessment. Second, should public health conditions do not allow for the holding of an examination diet in Spring 2022, awarding would be made on teachers' judgements based on normal in-year assessment.

These contingencies offer stability for teachers and learners in the coming academic session and will allow their focus to be on normal practices in teaching, learning and assessment. More detailed guidance will be issued by the SQA at the earliest opportunity.