

Please note this document accompanies Email Exchange 4, included within this return.

Buidheann-stiùiridh an Ionnsachaidh  
Learning Directorate  
Roinn Curraicealam, Teisteanas agus Gàidhlig  
Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic Division



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For Attention of:

Directors of Education

24 March 2021

Dear Director of Education

#### **NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS - CERTIFICATION OF PRIVATE CANDIDATES**

I am writing to determine whether any schools within your local area might have the capacity and be willing to volunteer to act as an approved centre for private candidates in this academic session.

Each year, the vast majority of candidates undertaking SQA National Qualifications study towards these within an approved centre i.e. in most cases, a school or college. However, a number of learners are private candidates – those who undertake their studies separately and only attend a centre to sit the final exam, with some limited engagement around any coursework elements. Private candidates may include school-age learners being home educated by their parents or tutors, or more mature students who are learning independently /remotely. We have engaged with the home education networks to try and understand likely numbers of private candidates, and we anticipate it being a small number.

For the 2020 qualifications, given the timing of cancellation of the exams, many home learners did not receive certification. Given the cancellation of the exams again in 2021, and the alternative certification model being introduced, mechanisms are needed to ensure that these learners are not disadvantaged and that their achievements can be recognised this year. We are seeking to ensure that private candidates have equal access to certification processes. We believe that this is only fair to the students themselves.

SQA's long-standing position is that candidates need to be entered through an approved centre, and that the centre would need to satisfy themselves of the authenticity of any evidence in arriving at a provisional result. We know from correspondence, that some private candidates are experiencing difficulty in finding a centre to work with them. We are not certain of the final figure, but evidence suggests that this would be very small numbers (if any) in each local authority area.

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We recognise the significant pressures that schools are under and that there will be variable capacity to engage with private candidates this year due to the challenges in verifying/ authenticating evidence when there is little to no ongoing engagement with these learners. However, it is considered that it would be equitable for private candidates to be treated, as far as possible, as other students – working with a centre to provide a range of evidence to enable teachers to determine a grade. The current assumption is that this would involve the centre setting and marking any private candidate assessments required for determining provisional results rather than authenticating learner generated evidence (unless there was surety of the conditions under which the evidence was generated/ marked). This could either be done within the centre or via remote assessment.

In relation to this matter, I would, therefore, be grateful if you could confirm whether any of your local schools are currently taking on any private candidates and/or whether any would have capacity and be willing to take on what is likely to be a small number of private candidates for the National Qualifications this year (including the assessment and/or authentication of evidence and submission of provisional results)? Alternatively, you may wish to have a discussion within your Regional Improvement Collaborative (RIC), to determine if there is a school (or number of schools) that could offer this support across the RIC area.

We are also contacting colleges and independent schools to determine whether they have capacity to support these candidates. Once we have a clearer view of capacity, we would aim to try and manage candidate numbers across any willing centres so that no one centre faced an undue burden. Despite the anticipated small numbers involved, we absolutely appreciate that this would represent an additional ask at an already very busy time for schools and teachers and, as such, we are exploring the possibility of some financial compensation for centres willing to take on private candidates.

With apologies for the short timescales, it would be most helpful if you could provide the above requested information by close of day on Wednesday 31 March to [REDACTED], Head of the National Qualifications Team. I appreciate that this timing may present challenges. However, I hope you appreciate that it is important that we gather this information now to assist us in helping ensure that this particular cohort of candidates has the opportunity to engage with centres in sufficient time to meet entry deadlines and follow the processes required to determine provisional results.

Many thanks in advance for considering this. Should you have any questions, or wish to discuss any of the above, please feel free to contact [REDACTED] directly via email [REDACTED] or on [REDACTED].

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Malcolm Pentland  
Deputy Director

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