

Enclosure 1: Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills - Meeting with the Chief Examiner and Chair of SQA – 18 September 2024

Meeting took place via Teams between 15.30 and 16.00

Attended by:

Jenny Gilruth MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Fiona Robertson, Chief Examiner and Chief Executive of SQA
Shirley Rogers, Chair of SQA
Clare Hicks, Director of Education Reform
Laura Murdoch, Deputy Director Curriculum and Qualifications

Note of discussion:**Scottish Government response to the Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment (IRQA)**

- The Cabinet Secretary outlined the key points of the Scottish Government response to the IRQA due to be published the following day.
- Intention that the response is a pragmatic approach to qualifications and assessment reform which is one part of the bigger improvement picture spanning early years, primary, BGE and into senior phase.
- The pragmatic approach was recognised and welcomed by SQA while all acknowledged the reaction would likely be mixed with some parts of the system wanting to go further, faster.
- The Cabinet Secretary confirmed that the post-Covid reality in schools and very challenging fiscal situation were factors in terms of framing the SG response.
- She also reiterated that the reform of Qualifications Scotland to face the qualifications reform work, engaging meaningfully with young people, teachers and the rest of the system in doing so, would be key.
- SQA made a commitment to playing their/Qualifications Scotland's part in taking forward qualifications reform as outlined in the SG response, flagging work already underway in this regard (e.g. work on rationalisation of SQA qualifications on offer, consulting on removing exams from some more practical national courses and seconding a secondary head into the organisation).

Marking of Higher History

- Ongoing concerns being raised around the marking of Higher History this year were discussed.
- SQA confirmed that, in light of those concerns, a review is already underway which is being carried out by their Head of Standards – an individual who has had no involvement in the marking of Higher History.
- The Cabinet Secretary asked for a further update once the review is complete (expected to be next week) and agreed with SQA that, if necessary, the findings will be reviewed independently.
- SQA confirmed that the findings will be published and both the Cabinet Secretary and SQA firmly agreed that if any issues are uncovered then action must be taken.

Agreed actions:

- SQA/Qualifications Scotland to further develop and share plans with clear milestones to deliver commitments made in the SG response to IRQA with officials.
- SQA to update the Cabinet Secretary and officials on the findings from the review of the marking of Higher History next week.