



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

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By email

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Dear Ms Robertson,

Thank you to you and Robert Quinn for appearing before the Education and Skills Committee on 1st May representing the SQA. As discussed during the meeting, the Committee considers it is vital that scrutiny of the replacement for the exam diet in 2020 focuses on giving clarity to the thousands of young people, teachers and parents reliant on the arrangements for this year. The Committee of course appreciates that the SQA is operating in extraordinary circumstances under notable pressure.

In the absence of the opportunity for young people to sit final exams and complete other assessments, transparency on the alternative processes is essential to instil confidence in the system being used this year. Only by being able to understand the detail of the processes to be followed can the public be assured that the system for arriving at grades will be consistent and fair. On that basis the detail of processes being followed need to be published in full as quickly as possible. A key example of this is details of the moderation process. The Committee has real concerns about the use of past performance of a school or a statistical distribution curve to inform decisions on the final grades of individuals.

As confirmed in your evidence, prior attainment of a school could be a factor in establishing the final grade of individual students. This could have a negative impact on students in lower performing schools. Given the correlation between deprivation and lower performing schools the Committee is concerned that this approach could have a disproportionate impact on the grades of students from deprived areas. Clarity is needed on the extent to which the moderation process will place an emphasis on:

- a) evidence a teacher can provide of performance;
- b) teacher judgment of projected performance by a student in the final exam;
- c) past performance of a school; and

d) any mapping of estimates onto a statistical distribution curve.

The Committee also wants to place on record the deep unease expressed by numerous teachers about the requirement to rank students, including with a far greater level of precision than previously required. The concerns include that ranking goes against the principles of the Curriculum for Excellence and that assessing students to within a fraction of a percentage point is, as one teacher in our [focus groups](#) put it, 'conflating precision with accuracy'. This is of particular concern in 'high stakes' subjects where a large proportion of the final grade is usually exam based.

Finally, as you are aware, there is a need to provide clarity on the appeals process before teachers submit their estimates. The process and evidence used to assess appeals; whether teachers should share estimates with students; and whether parents, carers and pupils should be able to submit appeals this year are key issues where clarity is required.

Below are a series of targeted questions explored during the evidence session with you where the Committee seeks further clarity in writing. Please respond, in as concise and clear terms as possible, to the questions below.

Moderation

Committee position: The Committee recommends that the methodology be published before teachers are required to submit estimates.

Questions

- When will the methodology used for moderation be published?
- Will this be published in full?
- Will this be in advance of teachers submitting estimates to the SQA?
- Or, as a minimum, will it be published in advance of students being given their grades in August?

Equalities Impact Assessment

Committee position: The Committee recommends that a completed EQIA on the moderation process, specifically on the emphasis on school performance, be completed and published in full.

Questions

- Do you consider there is a requirement to undertake an EQIA as part of the SQA's public sector equalities duties?
- As referred to in your evidence, as of 1st May what specific work had been undertaken on an EQIA and what involvement had the Equality and Human Rights Commission had? (*see Official Report extracts in the annexe*)
- Will an EQIA be undertaken?
- Will it be published in full?
- Will it be published before the methodology for moderation is finalised?

Appeals process

Committee position: The Committee recommends that the details of, and methodology behind, the appeals process be published in full before teachers are required to submit estimates.

Questions

- Will information on the appeals process be published before teachers are required to submit estimates?
- Will the full methodology be published?

The Committee seeks a response at your earliest opportunity.

Going forward, I will keep you informed of the Committee's further work in this area. For reference the Committee intends to pursue with Education Scotland the impact of the closure of schools on learning experiences that will feed into the 2021 exam diet. Any information you have on the SQA's work in this area, including collaboration with Education Scotland, would be very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

CLARE ADAMSON MSP
CONVENER

Official Report Education and Skills Committee Friday 1st May – relevant extracts on EQIA for moderation process

Extract 1

Ross Greer MSP: Has an equality impact assessment been done on the decision to include schools' historical attainment data in the moderation of the grades of individual pupils?

Fiona Robertson: Yes. As I mentioned, we are in discussions with the Equality and Human Rights Commission about the work that we are doing, to assure ourselves that the approach that we are taking is fair. Those discussions will include our work on an equality impact assessment.

Extract 2

Ross Greer MSP: Can I get clarification that you have not conducted an equality impact assessment? Can you confirm that you are going to do so and that it will happen before the end of this month, when teachers will have to submit their estimations?

Fiona Robertson: Work has been done on an equality impact assessment—I assure you of that—