EDUCATION AND SKILLS COMMITTEE

AGENDA

9th Meeting, 2020 (Session 5)

Friday 1 May 2020

The Committee will meet at 10.30 am in a virtual meeting and be broadcast on www.scottishparliament.tv.

1. **Decision on taking business in private:** The Committee will decide whether to take item 3 in private.

2. **Scottish Qualifications Authority - Covid-19:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive, and

   Robert Quinn, Head of English, Languages & Business, Scottish Qualifications Authority.

3. **Review of evidence:** The Committee will consider the evidence it heard earlier.

   Roz Thomson
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The papers for this meeting are as follows—

**Agenda item 2**

SPICe briefing paper SQA  ES/S5/20/9/1
Focus Group notes  ES/S5/20/9/2
Views from Young People  ES/S5/20/9/3
Submissions pack  ES/S5/20/9/4
INTRODUCTION

This paper is to support the Education and Skills Committee’s virtual meeting with Fiona Robertson, Chief Executive of the SQA on Friday 1 May 2020.

The purpose of the session is to explore the SQA’s response to the COVID 19 pandemic. While the SQA is best known for producing and certificating qualifications at the end of school, it also produces qualifications at HND and HNC levels and a range of vocational qualifications. As an accrediting body, the SQA will also accredit qualifications developed by other awarding bodies, including practical, professional awards or qualifications.

The remainder of this paper is structured into two parts or themes the Committee may wish to explore with the SQA. These are:

- The process and priorities of the SQA in its response to the pandemic.
- The certification process in 2020.

In addition, the Annexe to the paper provides a timeline and links to the SQA’s communications to date.

Policy developments in relation to the COVID 19 pandemic are fast-moving. This paper was drafted on 27 April 2020. Members should note that information may date quickly.

THEME 1: THE PROCESS, PRIORITIES AND COMMUNICATIONS OF THE SQA.

Purpose of qualifications

Before moving on to the SQA’s plans and priorities for certification, it may be helpful to discuss briefly the purpose of qualifications. This is complex and contested territory and it is not possible to do the subject justice in the space and time available.

An OECD paper in 2012\(^1\) stated that a key purpose of a qualification is to provide evidence of knowledge and skills gained. This is particularly useful to provide evidence to another educational establishment or employer. One way of considering the value of a qualification (as distinct to the learning that leads to it) could be the extent to which the qualification clearly and accurately communicates students’ achievements and is trusted to do so by others. A trusted qualification would or could allow the individual to access further employment or learning opportunities and employers and educational establishments would wish that the qualification provides a reliable and valid measure of skills and knowledge. Members will recall from its work on SNSAs in early 2019 that reliability is the extent to which an assessment is consistent (e.g. how likely two candidates

\(^1\) Assessment for Qualification and Certification in Upper Secondary Education: A Review of Country Practices and Research Evidence (pp13-15)
with the same skills and knowledge will be awarded the same grade), validity is how good
the assessment is at testing what one wishes it to test (e.g. having a certain level of
competence and knowledge). As the Committee will recall, no assessment is both
completely valid and reliable. In relation to summative assessment (e.g. exams), Winch
and Gingell (2004) state:

“No assessment can be perfect. There have to be compromises between reliability
and validity, and validity can never be 100%. There will always be … an inferential
gap between assessment performance and pupil knowledge.”

Another function identified by the OECD in relation to qualifications specifically with a final
exam could be to motivate learners to higher achievements; although this is somewhat
contested in academic literature. In terms of teaching and learning within the Scottish
system, schools put aside a good portion of the year for pupils to revise for exams, where
courses are recapped and learning is consolidated in preparation for an examination.
Revision does not necessarily have to be linked to an exam diet, however.

Process and priorities

The Annexe to this paper lists the publications issued by the SQA on the Coronavirus to
date (Monday 27 April). These communications illustrate a fast-moving picture, particularly
between the 12 and 26 March.

There are however few details on how decisions were arrived at and what other issues and
options have been considered. The communication issued on 18 March mentioned that
decisions had been taken by the Qualifications Contingency Group, which is chaired by the
Scottish Government. Other members of the group are: SQA; School Leaders Scotland;
Educational Institute of Scotland; the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland;
College Development Network; Colleges Scotland; Scottish Council of Independent
Schools; UCAS; and Universities Scotland.

The Qualifications Contingency Group’s schedule of meetings, agendas, papers and
minutes do not appear to be available on line at this time (27 April).

The SQA and the Scottish Government has set out overarching goals for the system they
have put in place. The SQA identified three principles for this work in its communication of
20 April:

- Fairness to all learners.
- Safe and secure certification of our qualifications.
- Maintaining the integrity and credibility of our qualifications system, ensuring
  standards are maintained over time.

In its communication on 2 April, the SQA indicated that it wished to “ensure consistency
both across the country and in comparison with previous years.”

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Winch and Gingell consider “knowledge” to include “know-how”, roughly synonymous with “skills” although
they dislike that term.

3 Harlen and Crick (2002), for example found mixed evidence for summative assessments motivating
learning. Should Members want more information, please contact SPICe directly.
There appears to be little information on plans and contingencies for next year’s diet. Members will be aware that many S3 pupils will begin their S4 courses in the summer term – different schools will organise their school years in different ways. National 4s and 5 and Highers are sized at 24 SCQF points, which roughly equates to 240 hours of total learning time, including around 160 hours of instruction. Pupils entering finishing S4 and S5 will often start the following year’s courses in June when they return to routine teaching and learning after exams. On 26 April, the National on Sunday reported that Larry Flannagan, General Secretary of the EIS, had called for the SQA to put in place more continuous assessment in qualifications in case of another wave next year.

Members may wish to explore with the SQA:

- Whether the SQA and partners had modelled and prepared for the impact of a pandemic on the exam diet.
- What impact cancelling the exam diet will have on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Other than the health advice, whether the Scottish Government set any limits to possible responses to the pandemic.
- Whether the SQA or the Scottish Government undertook any consultation on its response to the pandemic beyond the Qualifications Contingency Group. Whether, the SQA has undertaken an equality impact assessment on its plans for 2020.
- What other options were explored. For example, was a differentiated approach to different subjects, levels or years considered?
- What issues are there ensuring reliability of certification across the 2020 cohort?
- What are the issues in ensuring consistency between the 2020 qualifications and certification in previous years?
- What does the SQA mean by “fairness to all learners”. How will the SQA and others know if the SQA achieves this.
- Whether the SQA and its partners have begun work on pandemic-proofing qualifications for next year. How many weeks’ disruption to teaching and learning would jeopardise certification in 2021 under the current SQA qualifications.

**THEME 2: SQA CERTIFICATION IN 2020**

The SQA has made special provision for qualifications which require an externally assessed exam, it has also made adjustments for other qualifications. In a school context this will normally mean Nationals 2-5, Higher, Advanced Higher, Skills for Work and other awards. The SQA also produce qualifications at HNC and HND levels which are normally taken in Colleges or universities.
Schools

The core element of certification of exam subjects in schools will be teachers’ estimates of grades of individual candidates. The SQA explains:

“[Teachers] are best placed to have a strong understanding of how your learners have performed and, based on experience and the evidence available, what a learner would be expected to achieve in each course. An estimated grade is not just the result of one prelim or one project, but is a judgement based on activity across the year.”

The process estimation by teachers will have three stages:

- Determining the estimated grade as is routine.
- Placing candidates into subdivisions of the existing bands to give refined bands.
- Ranking all candidates at the school undertaking the qualification within the bands.

The first bullet is part of the routine work of teachers who provide the SQA with estimates in Grade bands, e.g. A1 or B3 (upper A and upper B respectively). This is used by the SQA as part of the routine administration of exam results. SPICe requested more details on this process from the SQA, but a response has not been received in time to inform this paper.

The additional subdivisions in the process for 2020 require teachers to place candidates in finer subdivisions within the Grade bands. The table below sets out the finer grade bands. Members will note that two of the bands (2 and 7) have three subdivisions while the others, with the exception of band 9, have two.
Once teachers have placed candidates into the refined bands, they are expected to rank the candidates within the refined bands. The guidance states:

“Within your subject departments you will need to discuss the rank order and come to a shared view of the standard being applied within your centre. We recognise that this will be challenging for some centres and in some subjects, given the current circumstances.

“One approach to rank ordering your candidates is:

- Each teacher or lecturer could start off by estimating bands and rank orders for their candidates
- Working with the subject lead, teachers or lecturers could discuss and compare the evidence of candidates at the top and bottom of the rank order within each grade, ensuring that a consistent standard is being applied and adjusting the bands accordingly.
• Teachers or lecturers could integrate the ranking of candidates by discussing individual candidates, beginning at the top of the rank order and working down.”

It is not set out in the guidance why candidates should be ranked. It may be that the ranking would be used to make any adjustments to teacher estimates for example by awarding a lower grade to the pupils with lower ranks within the grades where it is determined that a school has overestimated grades for that qualification’s candidates. The SQA asks that tied ranking be avoided where possible.

The SQA has put in place a number of quality assurance mechanisms. Before the estimates are provided to the SQA, they should be signed off by two teachers, including the subject lead and then by the head. In signing off the submission to the SQA, headteachers are asked to consider “how the distribution of centre estimates compares with the performance of the previous three years’ cohorts within the centre, especially for subjects with larger cohorts.”

Fiona Robertson’s 20 April statement about the new system stated:

“We will use the information from these estimates, in addition to prior learner attainment, where this is available. For example, if learners achieved National 5 or Higher courses, in a previous year.

“We will also look at schools’ and colleges’ previous history of estimating and attainment in each subject and level. We may moderate these estimates, up or down, if that is required.

“This process will produce the results for learners, using our national grades for each subject and level.”

Ms Robertson also stated that there will be a free post-results service this year, but at the time of writing it is unclear what this will entail and what evidence might be used to support any appeal. The SQA’s website also noted that any candidate would, as usual, have the option to retake a course in the future.

In supporting guidance, the SQA stated:

“An estimate is a holistic professional judgement based on a candidate’s attainment in all aspects of the course (ie all course components) and should reflect the candidate’s demonstrated and inferred attainment of the required skills, knowledge and understanding for the predicted grade and band estimated.”

Using this system is likely to benefit those candidates that perform well throughout the year, but for whatever reason, would not have performed as expected on the day of an exam. Those individuals who would either have exceeded expectations, or whose work means that it is difficult to evidence a higher grade may pose a difficulty for teachers. Concerns about the latter group who “who do not pull their socks up until the last minute” were raised with the Cabinet Secretary by Michelle Ballantyne MSP on 19 March 2020. Such learners would have nearly completed the course before learning that how they would be assessed would change. The Cabinet Secretary noted that this is “a very significant issue, and the chief examiner will be mindful of all those questions as she considers the approach to take.” (OR 19 March 2020, Col 50-51).
One other possible issue is that the accuracy of teachers’ predictions for grades may not be uniform for all pupils at all levels of achieved. A research paper commissioned by the UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills looked at predicted and actual grades using UCAS data. It found that around 52% of grades were accurately predicted, 42% were over-predicted and just 6.6% were under-predicted. Just under 90% of grades were accurately predicted to within one grade. Female candidates’ grades were more likely to be accurately predicted. Candidates predicted an A grade or below a D grade were most accurately predicted with C grade predictions being the least accurate – of course is it not possible to over-predict an A grade. Scotland was the most over-optimistic of the four nations. The study also found that predictions for Black candidates were least accurate; 39% of black applicants’ predicted grades were accurate and black applicants had both the highest percentage of over-predicted grades (54%) and under-predicted grades (7%). There were also differences in the accuracy of different socio-economic groups. One might expect teachers to tend to give the benefit of the doubt to in UCAS predictions which allow pupils to apply for courses. The SQA does not publish analysis of the accuracy of teachers’ judgements it receives. The SQA does not collect data on protected characteristics (except sex), or information on deprivation at an individual level.

For Nationals 2-4, Skills for Work qualifications and other awards, guidance issues on 2 April stated:

“Schools and colleges should provide unit results based on either existing evidence from assessments that have already been completed, and/or using their professional judgement of other learner evidence, including their knowledge of their learners, their progress and achievements to date …

“Given the current situation, the usual level of external verification is not possible, and we have therefore decided to postpone all remaining planned external verification activity. Schools and colleges have their own quality assurance systems and processes, which should be used to verify the appropriateness of these internal assessment outcomes and certification.”

Colleges and other courses

The approach to certification of HNDs and HNCs is similar to the approach for Nationals 2-4 and other awards offered in schools, which is noted above. The current guidance states that:

- Where necessary, college staff will use their own professional judgement to assess learner evidence and determine grades.

- SQA will operate a reduced external verification model to allow a reasonable level of quality assurance to be done remotely.

- SQA is reviewing the subjects where alternative approaches to assessment may not be suitable, and will provide further guidance.

The SQA also accredits a number of professional qualifications. Completion of these courses can be particularly important as they cover the competencies required to practice or join a professional body. SQA Guidance states:
“We are in discussion with all regulating bodies in the UK to agree appropriate arrangements for regulated qualifications and licence to practise qualifications. We will provide further guidance as soon as it is available.”

Members may wish to explore with the SQA:

- The strengths and weaknesses of the proposed system replacing exams in terms of validity and reliability. How this compares to the strengths and weaknesses of any normal exam diet.
- How will teachers’ ranking individuals help with the reliability and validity of the qualifications.
- Whether teachers will be able to account for candidates “who do not pull their socks up until the last minute” in their estimates. Whether teachers should consider whether a candidate would otherwise had performed poorly in exams, e.g. due to nerves, rather than a lack of subject knowledge and skills.
- Compared to grades achieved, how accurate are the estimates that the SQA collects from teachers. Whether the SQA’s data on estimated grades show any difference between the accuracy of predictions of male and female candidates or types of centres and the communities they serve, and if so, how this will affect the quality assurance activities.
- How will individuals’ previous performance, schools’ previous performance, and the national data be used to inform any adjustments to teachers’ estimated grades. What number of candidates would make previous years’ performance a poor indicator of the current year’s performance. Has the SQA sought a peer review of any statistical models it plans to use?
- How appeals will be evidenced and determined.
- In terms of HNCs and HNDs, when will the SQA complete its review of subjects where alternative approaches to assessment may not be suitable and provide additional guidance to colleges.

Ned Sharratt
SPICe Research

27 April 2020

Note: Committee briefing papers are provided by SPICe for the use of Scottish Parliament committees and clerking staff. They provide focused information or respond to specific questions or areas of interest to committees and are not intended to offer comprehensive coverage of a subject area.

The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP www.parliament.scot
Timeline of Communications

This Annexe provides links and short descriptions to announcements on the SQA’s certification in 2020.

The intention is to illustrate the fast-moving situation, particularly at the early stages. The descriptions of the communications relate to the communication, not the current situation.

A full list of the communications by the SQA can be found here.

**Thursday 12 March**

SQA is aware of the situation and at this point there were no plans to change exam timetable.

**Wednesday 18 March**

Scottish Government and SQA joint statement on the Coronavirus. Noted a meeting of the Qualifications Contingency Group. The release stated:

“In the event of school closures, the Qualifications Contingency Group agreed that every effort should be made to ensure schools remain partially open to allow Senior Phase pupils to complete learning and be able to submit coursework, in addition to being able to open as examination centres during the diet, should medical and scientific advice allow.”

And,

“In the meantime, we strongly suggest that schools and colleges continue to prioritise the completion of coursework, including for those subjects with later deadlines.”

**Thursday 19 March**

Following the announcement that the 2020 diet cannot go ahead, the SQA stated that it has been asked by the Deputy First Minister to develop an alternative certification model.

“The Deputy First Minister has asked schools and colleges to continue to work with young people to ensure that any units and coursework are completed and estimated grades are provided by teachers, drawing on the available evidence gathered throughout the year, to SQA’s existing deadlines, or earlier if that is possible.”

**Sunday 22 March**

No young person with SQA coursework to complete should attend school to do so.

**Tuesday 24 March**

Schools and colleges were advised that they were not required to submit learner coursework for marking, in Higher and Advanced Higher courses. For National 5s any coursework due to be uplifted in April and May will not be submitted for marking. The situation for National 5 coursework already received was not clear at this stage.
More details on how teachers will estimate grades were to follow.

**Thursday 26 March**

SQA and Colleges joint statement on Higher National certification. Outlines two aspects to the certification, first that teachers and lecturers will estimate grades where necessary and second that the SQA would undertake a reduced level of external verification.

**Thursday 2 April**

More details provided in a number of areas for schools as well as guidance for learners, parents and carers.

More details were provided on the way in which teachers and lecturers will be asked to prepare estimates. The guidance stated, “there is no requirement to set additional mock or prelim exams or homework tasks for the purpose of determining a learner estimate.”

The SQA extended the deadline for receiving estimates from 24 April to 29 May. It also announced that no National 5 coursework would be marked because “it has become clear that we can no longer proceed with the marking of the National 5 coursework received to date, in a safe and secure manner, that maintains the integrity of national standards.”

The statement provided guidance on the approach to quality assurance and certification for a range of other qualifications without final exams. The approach to these qualifications is teacher or lecturer estimates with less external verification than would normally be the case.

**Friday 3 April**

Further update to colleges from the SQA and Colleges Scotland.

*Easter break*

**Monday 20 April**

More details on how teachers and lecturers are expected to provide estimates which this paper draws upon above.

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4 National 2, National 3, National 4 courses, Scottish Baccalaureate Interdisciplinary Project unit and free-standing units at SCQF levels 5, 6, and 7, National Certificates, National Progression Awards, Skills for Work courses, and Awards.
Education and Skills Committee

9th Meeting, 2020 (Session 5), Friday 1 May 2020

Focus Group notes and submissions from teachers

Background

The Committee held three virtual focus groups with teachers on 27th and 28th April. These were focussed on the cancellation of the 2020 exam direct as part of the response to the Coronavirus.

The Committee offers its sincere thanks to the 28 teachers taking part in these sessions. The sessions involved teachers from across Scotland reflecting a wide range of subject specialisms.

The Committee also invited those unable to attend to take part in full in the focus groups to submit written answers to the questions posed during the focus groups. The notes and the submissions have been anonymised, with the exception of a submission from an attendee who is also a representative of the SSTA who was content to be identified. The focus groups notes and submissions from teachers are included below.

Focus Group notes

- Focus Group 1
- Focus Group 2
- Focus Group 3

Submissions from individual teachers

- Submission from a Social Subjects faculty in a rural comprehensive
- Teacher 1
- Teacher 2
- Teacher 3
- Teacher 4
- Teacher 5

Submissions from teaching unions

Catherine Nicol, Vice President, Scottish Secondary Teachers’ Association

EIS
Focus Group Notes

Focus Group 1 – MSPs present: Jamie Greene MSP (chair), Rona Mackay MSP

Communication

1. One teacher felt the initial information issued from the SQA was reasonable but conservative in the amount of information shared. Most of the teachers then suggested it had been too slow. The example was given of the time taken for an announcement that students should not return to school to complete coursework was cited. The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement on the Sunday while teachers were preparing for thousands of higher students to return to school the following day. Information from the SQA then issued on the Tuesday. A number of teachers mentioned this time delay and the anxiety created by it for pupils and teachers, with one suggesting the situation reflected a ‘failure of leadership’ by the SQA.

2. Suggestion was from a number of teachers that the usual approach has been used where SQA information is issued through whole schools by SQA co-ordinators is perhaps not the correct model for getting information out to all and fast. The term ‘business as usual’ was used by a number of teachers in relation to the SQA’s approach to sharing information.

3. More subject specific information was requested by a number of the teachers. It was also suggested that given the role of teachers this year as both teachers and assessors then the communications needed to place them more at the heart of the process than usual by the SQA. It was suggested that part of good leadership would be being responsive to questions of clarification direct from teachers and young people would be beneficial, that the current system requires more than a top down approach to disseminating information. It was suggested that teachers need to be partners in the process in the coming months. This could include being consulted more by the SQA on future models that can respond to school closures in future academic years.

Producing grade estimates

4. The inability to access schools to get information including coursework to estimate grades was raised a number of times. One teacher suggested had the advice been on the Friday that schools would not reopen for senior pupils to complete work, this would have allowed teachers the chance to gather this evidence before the schools closed. One teacher suggested their school was reopening for 4 hours in the coming days to allow access for teachers.

5. Ranking students was raised as an issue, one teacher asking why they need to rank their children implies no two students get the exact same grade. One teacher suggested lots of pupils or parents of pupils who are
worried they will be given a fail are seeking to withdraw from the exam. They asked what effect this will have if there is an averaging exercise undertaken by the SQA with all the estimated grades. When polled by the chair on whether the refined banding was sufficiently easy to understand to enable teachers to estimate grades the group responded that this was not the case. When asked through a poll whether they were confident the estimates provided to the SQA would be reflected in the final results issues most teachers were not confident. One teacher suggested they were more confident but the challenge is giving the student you knew would 'pull it out of the bag' the right grade. They suggested the majority of students would get the appropriate grade but some would be 'hard done by'.

6. The meaning of ‘inferred attainment’ was discussed, and there was uncertainty of how moderation by the SQA would work in practice using a distribution curve.

**Appeals**

7. Questions were raised about what evidence would be used to assess appeals. All of the teachers, when asked, agreed they needed more information on the appeals process as a matter of urgency. For example one person asked how will the appeals process work if much of the estimate is based on teacher judgment? What information will the SQA request from teachers when appeals are made?

8. One teacher suggested preliminary grades are not necessarily a reflection of a student’s ability, as the student would prepare far more towards the end of the year for the final exam. Teacher judgment would suggest that student will do well in an exam but if the evidence is not there to reflect that then to what extent can the teacher use their judgment? A number of teachers raised similar issues and suggested there were numerous students in this category.

9. One teacher suggested the move to the current post-results service had led to less evidence being gathered on students than before and a consequence of this is that teachers have less evidence to reflect their estimates or to base their estimates on. It was suggested that ‘diluting down the rigour of estimating pupils’ made assessing students, to within 1 to 2% of each other, this year was challenging. It was suggested this was an issue where exams were ‘high stakes’ ie a large proportion of the grade is the final exam (Higher English is 70% final exam).

10. A number of teachers suggested parents wanted to see the predicted grades that teachers suggest to the SQA.

**Electronic working**

11. In terms of future practices, one teacher suggested moving to schools submitting coursework to the SQA electronically as that would reduce
issue of evidence being in schools that teachers cannot access or being with the SQA in hard copy when the teachers could benefit from being able to refer to it for evidencing estimates. There was a lot of support across the group for this suggestion.

**Autumn exams / changes to school patterns**

12. When asked of the possibility if an autumn exam a number of teachers were unsure that would be possible or if there was time available. One supported the idea for those who are unhappy with their grade, as is the approach in England. They suggested the exam papers are ready to be used.

13. When asked about changing term times and holiday periods one teacher suggested making such changes would be very challenging to navigate, for example working time agreements would need to be renegotiated. They suggested there would be value in study support classes, which were variable in provision at present and often run on teacher goodwill, could be provided within a national framework.

**Equality**

14. A member asked about the impact of this year’s system on different cohorts of young people. One teacher suggested the advice from their senior management team and parental pressure was ‘all upwards’. If estimates are inflated the then the SQA would most likely reduce grades using the ‘curve’ and this, the teacher felt, would disadvantage those students that were genuinely performing to a very high standard.

15. One teacher suggested they were getting lots of evidence from private tutors provided through parents, with parents suggesting this evidence should be taken into account. Another teacher suggested in small schools and communities where teachers know all the parents the pressure is more pronounced. In the highlands there are lots of schools where there is one teacher for one subject so the pressure is on one individual. It was suggested big schools have more students to assess so more work for teachers, but they also tended to have much more data to call upon.

16. Concern was expressed for vulnerable young people and a number of teachers suggested teacher judgment would be very important in relation to these young people as teachers know their students well. One teacher suggested it would be ‘invaluable’ to go with ‘gut feeling’ for those young people.

17. Concern was also expressed for students studying Nat 3 and Nat 4. One teacher suggested there has been a lack of focus and information on those students. Another suggested they had been advised to pass them all, which would impact on the integrity of Nat 4.
Agenda item 2

Funding

18. A teacher that is usually also an examiner for the SQA suggested in a normal year large groups of teachers meet in relation to the exam diet. This would involve hotel costs and other expenses. These teachers would also be paid, for example as markers. They understood the SQA charges for completing courses, in the absence of exams, remains the same this year. The suggestion was made that this funding could usefully be redirected into school budgets this year.

Other issues

Online learning

19. EIS was praised by a number of teachers for supporting teachers including in relation to support for online learning.

Education Scotland

20. Education Scotland was criticised by two of the teachers, with one suggesting that the Cabinet Secretary has said Education Scotland is working to support schools but they were unaware of what direct role Education Scotland were playing with schools at present. All teachers responded ‘no’ to a poll on whether Education Scotland is supporting schools during this process. It was suggested peer to peer support and subject specialism support would be valuable from Education Scotland.

Focus Group 2 – MSPs present: Iain Gray MSP (chair), Alasdair Allan MSP

Communication

21. A number of teachers suggested that the SQA communication levels had been reasonable given the circumstances. There was a suggestion the ‘trickle down’ approach to disseminating information was not working well and was not the most effective approach to the current challenges. It relies on all levels of the process passing on information quickly. It was suggested by another teacher that the SQA need wider distribution and the details of the SQA academy needs to be distributed.

Producing grade estimates

22. Issue of evidence for estimates being held in the schools at present and teachers cannot access it was raised. One teacher suggested gaining access to the coursework they had already sent to the SQA before exams were cancelled would also be useful.

23. One teacher suggested there was a conflict between the evidence of an estimate they could offer and their judgment of what a student would
achieve in the final exam and it was unclear what emphasis should be placed in teacher judgment and what emphasis should be on evidence. There was support for the SQA’s decision to accept evidence from after 20 March but to be mindful of the evidence.

24. Challenges for probationers working alone were highlighted, it was suggested thee individuals feel exposed in the current process but that if you are an experienced teacher there is less of a challenge. A teacher suggested the level of experience of the teacher could impact on the accuracy of estimates. Another situation highlighted was where a teacher had been off work for a long period of absence and so had little evidence to base estimates upon. Another teacher suggested an influencing factor on estimates is when the department carries out an assessment of performance, will evidence come from earlier in the academic year for some students than for others?

25. On previous years’ performance being taken into account, one teacher said their attainment at their school had notable improved this year due to the leadership of a new headteacher and this will not be reflected if importance is placed on previous performance. Another example from another teacher was a small school where groups of ten students in the past three years were not academic but this year their group of ten is academic and performing to a high standard. The teacher asked how the ability of the students is taken into account when looking at performance in previous years. A further influencing factor was changes to the curriculum. One teacher explained that in the previous three years new qualifications had been rolled out and it had taken teachers time to adapt, and structures had also changed (their school has moved from 6 highers to 5). These changes have impacted on previous years’ performance.

26. One teacher suggested the proposed approach to estimation was ‘conflating precision with accuracy’, by deciding to narrow down into fine bands. This is a higher level of accuracy than has been asked of teachers in the past. The teacher considered this approach could generate accurate averages but that it was the impact on the individuals they were concerned about. For example, where someone in previous years is estimated a low score but achieved a high grade in the exam in practice. The emphasis on statistical data this year does not allow for this situation.

27. One teacher suggested they would be interested to know from the SQA the percentage accuracy of teacher judgment for past academic years. One teacher questioned how the curve approach being taken by the SQA would work this year when in previous years adjustments had been made to reflect the difficulty of the exam itself.

**Student experience**

28. The chair asked how the teachers felt the students were coping with the current situation and what support was being offered. Teachers suggested there was anxiety, with one teacher saying how devastated students were
in their school when it was announced exams were cancelled. Many students are concerned their attainment won’t be as high based on estimates. One teacher said students were saying how much harder they were going to work for the final exam. Another teacher suggested if the system allows teachers to base estimates on their judgement, factoring in the work towards an exam, then estimates would be higher than basing them on evidence.

Appeals

29. One teacher asked whether the rank order list would be made available to pupils when appeals are made? Another teacher suggested teachers were not being expected to rank order in exactly that way. The chair suggested there was an incredible degree of precision required and a number of teachers agreed with that suggestion.

30. On contact with parents, one teacher suggested they had been advised to re-route contact in relation to estimates to the local authority where they will be treated as FOI requests. That teacher had shared estimates with pupils in the past but would be nervous about doing so now. Another teacher said their headteacher had said to direct all enquiries for estimates from parents to the HT. The HT did not want to share estimates but did not want to generate FOI requests. Most of the teachers suggested they would share their estimates with parents, one suggested they had not been advised how to approach the situation.

National 3, 4 and 5

31. A teacher explained their concern for those students who did not finish units for national grades and suggested they were not aware of any advice being issued to reassure those students.

Focus Group 3 – MSPs present: Clare Adamson MSP (chair), Daniel Johnson MSP, Gail Ross MSP

Communication

32. Several teachers said there had been an improvement in communications recently, although initially the picture was more mixed. Concerns about the initial communications included that it took too long for communications to come out and that there was inconsistency between different local authorities. One teacher described the initial communications as ‘lacklustre’.

33. It was felt that problems with early communications caused undue worry for staff parents and students. One teacher suggested that it would have been better to contact people and give a timescale for when substantive
communication would be provided, rather than rush to try and answer questions with limited success.

34. Other teachers felt that it was too early to properly assess how effective the initial communications and support had been. In particular, there was a suggestion that it was only once teachers had a chance to see the training on grade estimates that it would be possible to assess how effective communication and support to teachers had been.

Producing grade estimates

35. A key concern raised by multiple teachers was students asking for their estimated grades, especially where the estimate could make a difference between getting a university place or not. Both teachers and students were feeling pressure over grade estimates. A number of teachers had been told to avoid giving students their grade estimates for legal reasons, although one teacher had only been given such advice on the day of the focus group, leaving a significant period where they had not been given clear guidance. Some teachers raised the issue whether students could make FOI request for grades. Some teachers also reported pressure as a result of knowing students needed particular grades, although they were confident that grade predictions would still be robust.

36. A number of teachers raised subject or curriculum specific issues when it came to producing estimated grades. In technology subjects, for example, where grades would usually be based on finished projects, existing projects were not accessible because they were in school buildings or with students and it wasn’t necessarily suitable to set new projects, both because of the difficulty of verifying who had done the work and because not all students would have the facility and resources to work on these at home. Some subjects had unit assessments at Higher level while others did not. Maths did not have any coursework assessment so the task for maths teachers when it came to producing estimated grade was different from that for teachers of other subjects.

37. One teacher pointed to the different experience of estimating grades for one of their subjects, where they were one of a number of teachers in the school who could work together to discuss grades and share views and another subject where they were the only teacher in the school and had had to work without support or input from colleagues, which increase the pressure on them as a teacher.

Use of evidence and supporting material for estimated grades

38. One teacher said that they were disappointed that materials that had already been submitted weren’t being used and that old NABs which could have been used to help produce a grade estimate weren’t available.

39. Most of the teachers expressed concern about the impact of yearly variation between cohorts on grades. There were examples of both
cohorts that were significantly exceeding the previous year’s cohort and cohorts who were not at the same level. The teachers were concerned about how the SQA would handle this variation when looking at estimated grades and whether students would be advantaged/disadvantaged by the results of previous cohorts.

40. Some teachers were concerned about what could be used as evidence to support estimated grades, especially if these varied from preliminary results. Teachers were being told not to set additional tasks to use for assessment now because they couldn’t be verified but it was unclear what evidence they could use to support higher or lower grades for students where they expected a variation between final and preliminary results. One teacher was concerned that they had been told by an SQA coordinator that any evidence from after 20 March would be questioned as it wouldn’t have taken place under exam conditions.

41. There was also some concern that the final grade should reflect what students would have achieved by the end of the year but that SQA documentation said to base the grade on work across the year. This was not a natural way to assess learning and was not what exams do.

Banding and ranking students

42. There was a clear difference in how the teachers felt about banding students and about ranking them. Banding was seen as a useful tool, if not an exact science, and something that teachers were used to doing.

43. Ranking students individually was something that many of the participants found unacceptable. As well as the arguments that it would go against both the principals of the Curriculum for Excellence and the ethics of teaching, there was also concern about how it could be achieved practically- for example where a subject was taught by a number of teachers in a school how could teachers rank students they had no experience of teaching or how could disagreements between teachers within the same subject about their own students be resolved.

Appeals

44. One of the main concerns raised during the focus group was about how appeals would be handled when the appeal was against the SQA lowering an estimated mark provided by a teacher.

45. The focus group participants were clear that the SQA should respect the professional views of teachers when it came to assessing pupils and that in the majority of cases the estimated grade should stand.

46. Teachers were also concerned about what evidence would be requested to support appeals. Given the work that teachers would be doing to produce the original grade estimate what else could be provided in the case of an appeal over the SQA lowering a grade.
Equality

47. Several teachers expressed concerns about the impact on equality for students in current exam years and students who would be taking exams next year.

48. For current students, teachers were concerned that access to equipment and study space was having an impact on how much work could be done and therefore how much evidence there was of current performance.

49. Teachers were also concerned that it was much more difficult to introduce new topics rather than build on existing learning, which meant that students going into an exam year next year could find their learning severely disrupted. Not all schools would be able to make up for this once pupils were able to return and this would be felt most in schools where students were less able to work remotely.

50. One teacher pointed out that to try and keep students engaged they took a daily registration but of almost 700 students only about half registered. They were aware of lots of EAL pupils who face barriers to online learning but council support for EAL students in their area was now being covered by 4 people rather than the usual 10.

51. Another teacher said that their school had a group of the most vulnerable young people who are removed from mainstream classes and are given PEF-funded additional support and had been having staff provide support these individuals this was only 20 of the most vulnerable out of 900 total pupils, 45% percent of which are in SIMD.
Submission from a Social Subjects faculty in a rural comprehensive

1. How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?

Lacking in information. When the announcement was made on 19th March to cancel exams teachers had no other guidance on how pupils would be graded except a notional statement about it would be based on coursework and teacher estimates. The official guidance on how this would actually work was not published until 20th April.

The announcement that exams should be cancelled should not have been made until there was a firm plan in place. As such a great deal of stress and worry was created for teachers and pupils and parents.

2. What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?

The information on refined bands is ok but is heavily dependant on prelim marks. More definition and clarity of “inferred attainment” is needed. Is there a threshold on inferred attainment as many pupils failed their prelim but will study last minute and “pull it out the bag” on the day of the exam. Information on ranking is very vague. It states that the evidence should be compared - is the attitude and work ethic of the pupil included in this or is it hard evidence?

3. What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?

What specific evidence will be accepted for appeals? What evidence can be used to help rank order?

4. What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?

Issue is that a lot of “hard” evidence e.g. class tests, homework, timed essays are stored in schools so teachers do not have access to the material that they should be using to make these important decisions. Many teachers in our faculty who had to leave school quickly only have prelim results as everything else is in school.

5. To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?

Before the Easter break some teachers in our faculty were asking pupils to complete essays however most teachers tried to gather other previous evidence e.g. from jotters, homeworks etc
6. **What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils?** (for example individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam conditions)

Hugely difficult. Some pupils leave studying to the last minute and will perform well on the day. It is difficult for teachers to estimate this as there might not be corresponding evidence through the year to support it. (e.g. I had a pupil last year at N5 Modern Studies who went from a D in his prelim to an A band 1 in the exam!) This is very difficult to estimate.

7. **What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?**

Many pupils are disappointed their hard work for their assignments have gone unmarked. Pupils and parents genuinely have faith that the teachers will give students a fair grade however there is a great concern that SQA will change (lower) grades to fit statistics.

There needs to be public reassurance that the SQA trust the decisions of the teachers. The EIS have supported this saying that they trust the professional judgements of teachers and SQA should do the same and let the pupils and parents know this- that grades will not be altered unless for a justifiable reason. Reason press coverage has fuelled public distrust in the SQA.

8. **Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances, subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?**

Our Geography cohort this year is an exceptionally good one. We have 53% of pupils estimated on gaining A pass but our 3 year comparison is 19%. How will this be viewed by SQA?? Will pupils be disadvantages because of statistical boundaries??

9. **Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-judgement?**

Yes as long as they trust the professional judgements of the teachers!!

10. **Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges presented by this situation?**

Clear and open communication to all.

Give pupils and parents a simple timeline of the full process involved.

Clear information on the appeals process for both parents and teachers.
Teacher 1

1. **How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?**

   I think this has been rather poor, slow, unresponsive and lacking in details. Whilst this is unique situation given what was happening around the rest of the world they seemed particularly unprepared and continued to adopt a business as usual response. It became clear that coursework could not be completed in the circumstances when schools were asked to close and yet pupils were planning to go into schools to complete coursework. It was only after the announcement on the Sunday that coursework should not be completed that this was stopped.

   The communication with regards to what happens to learners in schools studying N3, N4 or NPA courses has been scant at best. There have been statements with colleges but surely these pupils deserve to be addressed in the main SQA announcements too.

2. **What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?**

   It is difficult to estimate to such fine bands and seems odd to suggest that anything can be predicted so precisely. SQA marking in normal years is not as exact. My subject is more precise, but instruments of assessment differ so will their difficult. I can understand ranking, but this level of banding is questionable.

   Differences in how to estimate will be considerable, is it the fair wind situation what they might get, an estimate based upon all the evidence held, an estimate based upon the better pieces of evidence.

   Experience shows that what is accepted as evidence for exceptional circumstances or appeals bears little relation to the headline range of evidence accepted approach stated by senior SQA people. In reality it seems to come down to prelim, SQA unit tests or possible A/B tests but nothing else.

3. **What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?**

   It should transparently show the statistical modelling that is going to be applied to the estimates submitted.

4. **What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?**

   It may be difficult with larger cohorts and numbers of classes to rank pupils where nobody knows all of the teachers and comparative judgements are needed. Equally since schools are closed the materials to judge may not be at hand at all and just a series of marks.

   Due to SQA delays in guidance and details I have already completed some estimation already, so this is doing it again to different criteria.
Some pupils may find themselves disadvantaged because they would have worked hard and revised and may perform better in the exam than the teacher anticipated or than evidence the teacher has says.

5. **To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?**
   I am not doing this but this has been going on consistently in a wide range of schools as teachers and schools asked pupils to produce work for evidence purposes. Second Prelims sat at home are not uncommon.

6. **What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils?** (for example individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam conditions)
   This is a much wider issue than the position that we find ourselves in this year. Teachers have always known that some candidates can perform well in exams after a short burst of hard work and revision other pupils will work consistently throughout the year and show good effort but will be unable to shine in an exam for a variety of reasons.

7. **What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?**
   Young people and parents are nervous that the effort they have put in this year to attain their qualifications will not be recognised or may be diluted by inflated grades for other candidates. Schools are increasingly saying things like prelims don't matter indeed my SLT said the same and now some have evidence that is not as clear as it could be.

   I would like there to be an opportunity for pupils to sit an exam in September if they are not happy with the grade awarded. I actually think this should take place every year rather than candidates always resitting a whole year within school. This is happening in England. The exams are written so why not use them then. I think the results should be earlier too.

   Going forward online digital SQA assessments should be used to capture information throughout the course.

8. **Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances, subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?**
   Individual cohorts can vary quite significantly especially when they are not the whole year group so perhaps just 40 of the year. Last year I had about 4 out of 30 at A or B, this year I have evidence for 12 out of 30 a big difference. Perhaps with whole cohorts this is less significant, but we cannot say that this year's cohort would do the same as the last, otherwise why would be bothering to do exams or with school improvement?

9. **Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-judgement?**
I do not agree with the preciseness of banding and also think there should be complete transparency over what changes and why they are done to submitted estimates. I am not happy with the lethargy of the SQA response.

10. Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges presented by this situation?

Offering an autumn diet of external exams for those who feel disadvantaged would be a fairer solution using the already prepared exams. I would expect this would mostly be for those at Higher level.

Teacher 2

1 How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?

The main issue was the ‘lag’ from the government announcing that schools would be closing, and the time taken for the details of how the SQA qualifications would be administered. This caused a great deal of concern and heightened anxiety for members of the teaching community.

It also created a panic amongst some head teachers, who hurriedly tried to get pupils to complete assessments/coursework etc. in the few days before the closure. In addition, some schools in my local area, tried to arrange for pupils to come into the school after the closure, causing stress amongst pupils/parents and teaching staff.

Many teaching staff rushed to complete predicted grades etc... only for the information from SQA to change, meaning that the work already completed by staff was now of little use. The message should have been clear from the start, do nothing until SQA have decided how they wanted to proceed.

2 What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?

This is the main concern with members of the teaching community, especially in some subjects.

The government announced that predicted grades would be created from current evidence, which included coursework, unit assessments, prelims. The issue with this is that some subjects do not have coursework or unit assessments, so the only ‘official’ piece of work could be a prelim that was completed in the November/December of 2019. This gives no account of any value-added work that would be carried out in the remaining 4-5 months of the academic year.

This creates the situation that a teacher will feel quite strongly that a pupil will pass their subject, but have no formal evidence for this, apart from their ‘gut feeling’. This is something that has always been frowned upon historically, so this creates a difficult situation for teaching staff. In addition, as a teacher, you did your best for all your pupils, but the grade a pupil received, was based upon their performance in the final examination. Now, we are being asked to decide the fate for our pupils, which is extremely difficult, as you know your pupils and what they hope to do, and you don’t want to be the one to put a stop to their dreams and aspirations.
Deciding the bands for pupils is an achievable task, but the refined bands will be extremely difficult, and to then attempt to rank the pupils within those refined bands will be nearly impossible, especially when you may have a large cohort of pupils being taught by a number of different teachers. You now have a situation where 6 staff may be using gut feeling to rank pupils within refined bands. SQA need to give much clearer guidance on how this can possibly be achieved for specific subjects, rather than generic advice.

3 What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?

I feel the advice needs to be more subject specific, take for example National 5 Mathematics. There is no course work, no unit assessments and a prelim that may have been completed in November. Gut feeling is all you can really go with to band these pupils. Now remember that you may have 150 pupils in the year group taking National 5 mathematics, spread across 6 teachers, how can you possibly rank the pupils within the refined bands?

An additional problem is that if you try and coordinate this with members of staff socially isolating, you have created a near impossible task.

SQA need to recognise and address this type of situation.

4 What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?

I personally have enough data resources, as spreadsheets etc. can easily be distributed between staff socially isolating, but as mentioned in the previous response, it is the ability to moderate the banding with staff. The task would be difficult if we could meet in person, but the fact we are socially isolating creates a near impossible situation for some subject areas.

5 To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?

This is an exceedingly difficult area for the following reasons:

- Teachers have no ability to confirm the validity of the work.
- Was the work completed under exam conditions?
- Parents may have assisted their child, remembering that some parents may not be able to help their child depending on the level of qualification.
- Pupils may collaborate with each other to find the correct answers, sharing their work on social media.
- A significant number of pupils may not have access to suitable hardware or WIFI connections and may miss out on the chance to complete the work.
- How is the work distributed to pupils, and their responses collected?

I know some schools/staff who are setting work that may be used for evidence gathering, but I strongly feel this is not appropriate and should be stopped immediately, it is creating a situation where the more disadvantaged in our society are going to be even more disadvantaged. All the work to narrow the gap could be undone in an instant.
6 What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils? (for example, individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam conditions)

This can only be addressed by going with a teacher gut feeling, there are always pupils who do far better than you expect, and those that underperform. Sadly, there is no solution to this problem at this moment in time.

7 What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?

The main concern I have experienced from pupils and parents is how this will be implemented in the coming months, and the implications for pupils wanting to go to college/university.

I have had pupils who did not perform very well in their prelim, but I am certain would pass the final examination with the additional time. There is a great deal of concern that they will be graded solely on the prelim.

We have been instructed that under no circumstances should predicted grades be discussed with pupils or parents.

8 Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances, subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?

It is reasonable to expect a cohort to perform in a similar way to the previous 3 years unless there have been some changes to a department or school.

This could include staffing issues within a department or school or a change in the catchment of a school. Either of these could have a huge impact, especially in shortage subjects, I for example had to run a mathematics department with a 35% staffing shortage for 9 months due to no subject specialist teachers available or supply staff. These classes had to be rotated between the available staff and non-specialist cover within the school.

Situations like this have a massive impact on current and future attainment within that department.

9 Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-judgement?

I personally cannot see an alternative; I just feel that the communication between different agencies needed to be more coordinated at the beginning. In addition, I feel there could have been more consultation with teaching staff, rather than people who are disconnected from the front line of teaching.

I do feel that a teacher’s judgement is an enormously powerful tool, we see the pupils on a very regular basis, and have a good ‘feel’ for how they are coping. The only issue is that it is extremely subjective and could be abused by the exceedingly small number of the less professional members of my teaching community, but hopefully this could be picked up in the quality assurance procedures.
10 Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges presented by this situation?

I feel I have covered most aspects of my concerns about the current situation, my only real concern is the impact this may have on the mental well-being of my pupils and colleagues.

It is an extremely challenging time for everyone, and I look forward to the day when I can once again stand in front of my classes and carry on with what is one of the greatest jobs in the world.

Teacher 3

1. How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?

Communication has been reasonable and depends on schools conveying this from the SQA coordinator.

2. What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?

It is difficult to estimate to such a narrow degree, given that SQA normally works in 9 bands to try and estimate using school-based evidence to an even finer degree is difficult.

3. What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?

The schools must work on the snapshot of performance when pupils were in class and how they performed in prelim exams. To try and extrapolate performance to how they would have performed in a may exam is of dubious worth. Although teachers have a gut instinct about whether a pupil may “pull it out of the bag” this isn't a basis for estimating a band under the current circumstances.

4. What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?

Annually teachers will produce estimates of anticipated performance in an external exam. At no point is the teacher who has supported the learner through their journey to an exam expected to grade the candidate without specific SQA criteria for coursework. This year all teachers will be wanting to try and inflate grades or take the best-case scenario for all their pupils to try the best for them as is the nature of a good teacher. Hence some pupils may find themselves disadvantaged because they would have worked hard and revised and may perform better in the exam than the teacher anticipated.

5. To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?

We (Highland Council schools) have been advised not to gather any further evidence and set no more assessment which is fair. Any assessments carried
out at home will be unfair to candidates who are unable to use more varied
resources and ‘cheat’ on assessments carried out at home.

6. **What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils?** (for example
individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams
alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam
conditions)

This is a much wider issue than the position that we find ourselves in this
year. Teachers have always known that some candidates can perform well in
exams after a short burst of hard work and revision other pupils will work
consistently throughout the year and show good effort but will be unable to
shine in an exam for a variety of reasons.

7. **What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people
and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish
Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?**

Many young people and parents are nervous that the effort they have put in
this year to attain their qualifications will not be recognised or may be diluted
by inflated grades for other candidates. The action I would like to see taken by
the Scottish government is the prelim marks and evidence of attainment
throughout the whole course in coursework is the basis for any estimate
grade and the estimate grade based on inferred judgement should be put to
one side.

8. **Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform
similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances,
subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?**

It is reasonable to expect a cohort in a school to perform similarly in the
previous few years. However, there are many extenuating circumstances.
The main difficulty with this is schools who have worked hard to raise
attainment in line with Scottish government advice and whose results have
been in the ascendency in the last 5 to 10 years. It is recognised in education
that even large schools can previous “poor” year groups but “knows” that it
had a good year group for presentation this year they may be disadvantaged.

9. **Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the
correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the
schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-
judgement?**

The SQA initially took a correct stance in terms of evidence-based estimates.
However further guidance diluted this and has opened discussion between
schools, teachers, parents and candidates as the criteria for revised estimate
grades. Clearer guidance on basing grades purely on evidence would be
further.

10. **Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges
presented by this situation?**

The fairest solution I can think of is to exceptionally run an autumn diet of
external exams for those candidates who feel that they were disadvantaged
by the estimates process. The majority of pupils will have the grades they feel
they deserved and earned. Rather than the appeals or exceptional circumstances process, a secondary diet of exams using the papers that would have been prepared for the 2020 May exams could be used for these candidates. This would cause disruption to some schools having a period of exam leave for some pupils midway through a session, however it would allow them to attain a grade and focus on the other studies later in the year. I would anticipate this would mostly be offered for higher level as many advanced higher and national 5 students will not need these qualifications by that stage.

Teacher 4

1. How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?

   Slow. The first announcement we got was 5.30pm on the Thursday before we split up for Easter holidays. This was too late and left us in limbo over the holidays while we waited for further instruction. This was stressful for staff and pupils.

   Then when the announcement came on the 20th April, it was still quite vague, but at that point, and given the timescales, we (i.e. staff doing the estimates) just had to get started on the process even although we weren’t that clear what to do.

   I really appreciate this is a complex process for the SQA but I’m not sure that they’ve taken into account that as teachers, we’re having to do estimates on top of trying to keep Teaching and Learning going as well.

2. What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?

   Very little it seems. I’m using the table in the SQA document to set bands but this is only useful for numerical attainment data that we have. That is ultimately what our estimates are going to be based on. Generally, I’m happy with that since it is solid, robust evidence but there are going to be some pupils who fall through the net – the ones who ‘pull it out the bag’ for the final but for whom there is little or no prior hard evidence for this.

3. What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?

   Maybe the SQA are going to provide more advice on the on-line SQA Academy course they mentioned which was meant to be available today – although I’ve seen no signs of that yet. And not really clear who that course is for – class teachers? Principal Teachers trying to quality assure? SQA coordinators? And why wasn’t that course ready at the very start of the estimates process – we’re already underway.

4. What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?
Most of us had second-guessed what the SQA would want for evidence so we took results, etc home with us although I do know that some teachers have had to get special permission to go into school to get evidence, so they can review it. We also have a new pupil who moved to our school recently. We have no evidence for her as her old school hadn’t yet forwarded it. What do we do for her?

And of course, Time as a resource is paramount. I’m really struggling to set work for classes AND manage the estimate process in my dept. The SQA seem determined to stick to their certification timetable, which is laudable but that is taking quite a toll on teachers working on the ground, especially given that we are not enjoying the benefits of ‘study leave’ as we are expected to be providing seniors with work at a time when they are normally working totally independently.

5. To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?

Not at all – I thought we weren’t to do that as advised by SQA and unions. But it is a case that some schools may still set tasks and use that – that will surely put them at an advantage since pupils will realise the importance of it and put the effort in. Surely to be fair, it should ONLY be evidence that was completed prior to school closure.

6. What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils? (for example, individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam conditions)

These pupils are a major concern – and make up for a considerable majority, we KNOW that many pupils, especially boys cram at the end and this is a strategy, whilst discouraged, often pays dividends. These pupils quite simply don’t have a folio of evidence throughout the year that allow teachers to make a valid estimate even although we feel they would do better in the final exam. I doubt very much (and nor should they, I may add) that the SQA would accept an estimate that is based on nothing other than the teacher’s gut feeling.

We’ve also mainly focussed on N5-AH. What about N3/4, we’re really concerned about them and how we can certify them – or not.

7. What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?

I watched a news report where senior pupils were interviewed, and they were concerned that if a teacher did/didn’t like a pupil that would be reflected in the estimate that was given to them by the teacher. Even if teachers do not show bias in this way (and we’d sincerely hope that as professionals we will all show absolute integrity), if pupils do not have that belief in us then we have a problem.
Pupils and parents understandably also worried about the standing of their results with Uni/college/employers not just this year but in the future – will this year’s cohort be labelled the ‘COVID cohort’ in a detrimental way?

I’m also worried about next year for the following reasons:

- For pupils moving on to the next level in a subject, they haven’t gone through the process of consolidating their knowledge when they revise for the final exam, so exam results aside they are going to be ill-prepared for the move up. Certainly, we’re trying to encourage seniors to keep up with their learning, but I haven’t had much response from them in this respect.
- If we don’t get back to school until August or even late June, we’re already behind schedule. Will the SQA counteract this? Maybe by reducing the courses for next year to two units only? Or withdraw the need for the Assignment to help claw back a little time? If they do decide to do something like this, they need to let us know soon so we can plan for this at ground level.
- What happens if we have to close schools again, if there’s a second wave of COVID, as is being widely predicted. We need to have a plan in place. We cannot go through this estimate process again – given that S5 (new) would be getting an estimate partly based on their estimates from this year – far from ideal.
- And not least of all, the impact of this prolonged closure and the resulting hiatus in Teaching and Learning, especially for seniors, is going to have on pupils’ attitude and commitment. I reckon it’s going to be really hard to get them all re-motivated. Furthermore, I think we’ll see an increased attainment gap where some pupils are simply not getting the support at home that others may.

8. **Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances, subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?**

I’ve already been doing analysis in this (and have been for years) so I’m well aware that particularly being in a small school (roll 650ish) results and uptake can vary widely from year to year, whereas in a large school with bigger numbers you’re more likely to see trends adhering to the national norm. This could really disadvantage our candidates. It is not unusual for our results to vary either from our own attainment data over time or comparing our data to national data. That’s just how it is – pupils are variable!

Also worried about subjects who are running for the first time this year. I’m doing the Scottish Science Baccalaureate for the first time – given my inexperience I can’t imagine that there’s going to be a lot of faith in my judgement as a first timer. The same is also true of NQTs who are caught up in this process. I’m supporting my NQT as much as I can but at the end of the day she knows her pupils best and once we’ve done the numerical data crunching, she has to make her overall judgement. She is feeling really apprehensive about this.

9. **Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-judgement?**
Oh, I just don’t know, this is an impossible situation and whilst we are all coming up with negative comments regarding the SQA performance so far, what else could they have done? I truly appreciate that they are in as big a dilemma as we are and it can’t be easy. I do wonder however who the deciding committee was made up of. Were there any practising teachers there? They are the ones who know the intricacies and practicalities of managing evidence and what is realistic at school/subject level. I feel that maybe the instructions and advice we have been given (so far) are a bit devoid of decisive and inarguable practical advice and instruction. There seems to be a bit of conflict in the idea that the SQA don’t want pupils to be disadvantaged by work not completed (rightly so), yet they want estimates to be based on evidence (also rightly so!).

If the SQA had given us specific instructions as to what specific evidence, we should use and what to do with it then we would know that at least everyone in the country was doing the same and therefore there would be a degree of parity. At the moment, I’m doing what I think is a correct interpretation of the guidelines but I’m just not sure – am I disadvantaging my pupils by ensuring that I only put in an estimate that is actually evidence based?

However, maybe that will be answered by the SQA Academy course for which we still wait. Given that as a Principal Teacher Science I have several courses and levels to oversee I’ve had to get started on the estimating process and I fear that further instruction will come too late to be manageable.

I also would appreciate more information on moderation of our estimates. To my knowledge there isn’t a list of what they’d like us to provide in the event we’re selected. Indeed, how will they select which centres/subjects/levels to moderate. I think we need more transparency in this respect. And who is going to carry out this process – presumably they are going to need additional staffing. Is that going to fall to SQA marking teams?

As an SQA appointee (marker, writer, verifier, etc) I’m feeling quite demoralised at the lack of communication during this time. Other than an email saying we weren’t required there has been nothing. Would it not have been useful to have used the knowledge and expertise of these teams to have help guided the process as we are in a position where we can see issues from both centre and SQA perspective? I think perhaps we have been undervalued in this respect.

10. Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges presented by this situation?

I really wish I did, but I think we need as a matter of urgency to start planning for another disruptive year next year, I think it’s inevitable that it’s going to be another abnormal year.

Teacher 5

It is difficult to estimate within these tight parameters, but teachers can use their professional judgement. Some staff in my faculty are concerned about what evidence will be required by SQA on the appeals process.
I am also concerned about the opportunities or lack of opportunities some candidates have had to produce evidence of attainment after schools were closed for instance I asked my pupils in Higher Sociology to produce their Assignments (if possible) or to send me what they had already completed even though they were not required by SQA.

There were 4 teaching weeks left before study leave and traditionally during Easter holidays some additional revision classes run and pupils tend to focus on study.

Pupils are also concerned and have been in touch with myself and other teachers in my faculty about estimates. My school have said to teachers not to tell pupils their estimate which is different to normal practice and so concerns some teachers.

I have concerns about National 4 candidates who did not have the opportunity to complete their Units or AVU. Can any system be put into place to help these candidates? Similarly for National 3 candidates.

Catherine Nicol, Vice President, Scottish Secondary Teachers Association

1. How would you describe the communication and support provided by the SQA for schools and individual departments or teachers?

The communication during the period has led to confusion. The SQA have made decisions based on their own set of priorities. At the beginning of the crisis the e-mails being sent to SQA Co-ordinators in schools focused entirely on telling them that normal processes should be followed and there would be no changes to their requirements. Teachers were trying to complete course work and gather evidence of pupil attainment from pupils who had not completed coursework and/or assessments because they had been absent from schools or had been slow to produce the work required to demonstrate their attainment level when the school closure was announced.

The SQA were clearly more concerned with the security and integrity of the systems they have in operation than anything else. The body did not appear to be taking into account the implications of school closure would have for teachers, pupils and parents/carers. They maintained their position regarding the type of evidence they would accept, deadlines that they had set before the crisis and the manner in which this evidence would be collected even though school closure was inevitable. Even after the schools were closed the SQA were asking for evidence that could only be obtained by teachers or produced by pupils if they had been in a school building. This demonstrated a stunning lack of awareness of the practicalities of complying with the assessment processes that SQA have developed and that pupils and teachers have to comply with.

Communications about developments were sent to SQA Co-ordinators in schools even though teachers were working from home. Reliance on the
School Co-ordinators and Education Authority staff to disseminate information continued. This is fine if the information is shared. There also appears to be an expectation that teachers would continually refer to the SQA website for updates on the changes that were being made to the assessment procedures. The SQA had made an assumption that teachers would have devices and software that could be used to do this.

2. **What support is there to estimate where pupils lie in bands and refined bands?**

The SQA have gradually updated their website. It now contains pages containing FAQs regarding questions which teachers, pupils and parents might have regarding assessment and the ward of qualifications. There are links to webpages which will be useful to those who need to understand course requirements and how course work is assessed.

There is also a link to the SQA Academy, this leads anyone who clicks on it to information and explanation on how estimates are made and how teachers will decide on estimates and rankings. This is informative and can be used by practitioners to guide their decision making. There is an assumption that the evidence of achievement will be to hand during the decision making process. There still seems to be a lack of recognition that hard evidence will not be available.

There is a danger that some feel they and/or others should go into school buildings to seek out evidence or gain access to records that they have on computers and other storage systems so this can be used to support professional judgement. It needs to be made very clear to all that this should not happen. Local authorities have also produced guidelines that staff should follow when they are going about this task, these broadly mirror the SQA advice. Teachers are being asked to “meet” to have discussion about estimates and rankings. Colleagues can meet with those in their faculties or if in small departments they can arrange to meet with peers who work in schools within the authority to discuss the rationale for assessment decisions. Middle leaders are being asked to quality assure the process and provide support/challenge where required. This process will be repeated when middle leaders report to Senior Leaders within schools. Head Teachers will then report to senior leaders in the Education Directorates. The SQA will be sent estimates after they have been calibrated against performance data at every that is available at Middle/Senior leadership level and then at the Directorate beforehand.

3. **What could the further guidance being prepared usefully cover including further details that will be issued by the SQA on the appeals process?**

The SQA have stated that the assessment evidence that they have been sent will be used in the appeals process. If this has been taken into account during the estimate phase this means that it is effectively being assessed twice. How will this be addressed?
Some assessments have to be done under exam conditions, teachers will not have seen this. Some work is not done under exam conditions, teachers will have had the opportunity to see the final version that was sent to the SQA. This could cause a bias in any appeal system. How will this be addressed?

Some schools will need to rely on evidence gathered during the BGE phase. Will the SQA allow such work to be included in the appeals process?

Teachers will making estimates based on their reflections on a pupils past accomplishments. How will the SQA support professional judgement in the appeals process.

Teachers do not have access to hard copies of pupil work in many cases. They are to keep evidence for moderation and verification purposes. What criteria are the SQA going to use when they are asking teachers to justify their decisions about the work pupils have produced?

Teachers are held to account regarding the results gained by every pupil that they teach in autumn. There is supposedly a statistical method that can be used to compare pupil performance with a reasonable accuracy. This situation is unprecedented so how will this year’s performance be measured and reported?

4. What are the resource implications for teachers and schools producing estimates?

Teachers do not have access to hard copies of pupil work in many cases.

Teachers do not have access to records of work.

Teachers do not have access to assessment records.

Teachers might not have access to software/computers required to be involved in remote team meetings.

5. To what degree are teachers setting tasks now to gather evidence to estimate grades and rankings?

This process has just begun. Everyone was waiting to see what the SQA were going to set in motion. The training went live on the 27th April. Many did not receive the link to the information they needed on the first day, see earlier comments about communication. Some will not be able to begin the process until they can contact colleagues, some will be delayed as this colleague might be work in a different school in their authority. There is an assumption that teachers have each other’s contact details and that it is easy to contact colleagues using Glow and existing networks. This is not the reality of working in the teaching profession.

6. What are the challenges in assessing distinctions in pupils? (for example individuals who work unevenly through the year and perform well at exams
alongside candidates that do not perform well under pressure and exam conditions)

Teachers work very closely with pupils during the year. Learning conversations happen in every lesson, jotters and assignments are returned, pupils’ contributions to group tasks are noted. This in addition to performance in class tests can be used to gauge pupil performance and make decisions on performance rankings. Teachers are given information about significant incidents that may affect pupils’ performance throughout the year. Changes to family circumstances, incidents of ill health and mental insecurity and difficulties with peer relationships are reported regularly. The challenge lies where a pupil’s has joined the school recently and there is not much background information to go on. If pupils have been absent for an extended period of time or have been unwell and this has prevented them from producing practical work then this will also have an impact on assessment decisions.

7. What are the main concerns expressed by parents and young people and what actions would you like to see taken by the Scottish Government, the SQA or others to support parents and young people?

Some pupils have been concerned because they know that they did not prepare for prelims very well. Many have admitted that they did not put much effort into internal assessments because they were relying on making up any shortfall by studying for the final exam. Many pupils do leave it until the last minute to begin studying, they see the final exam as being the most significant benchmark that will be used to assess their performance. Frankly many pupils and perhaps parents do not appear to appreciate the importance of internal assessment. I have spoken to pupils who will admit that they have not engaged positively with the learning process during the school year and believe that they can make up for this by studying for the final exam.

The importance of the National 4 and National 3 qualifications within the framework needs to be reinforced. Internal assessment of coursework by teaching professionals has to be given more credence. There should be less reliance on a final exam to benchmark pupils’ level of attainment. We have moved to a curriculum based on problem solving ability. This type of skill set we are teaching pupils today is not best evidenced by a final exam. If we do not need exams for Nat 4 we should not have them for other National qualifications either. Exams suit a narrow band of pupils who are blessed with a good memory, know people who will aid them to achieve in exams: have access to environments that are conducive to study and possess resources that help them train to sit a short test.

8. Is it reasonable to expect that a cohort in a school is likely to perform similarly to the previous three years? Are there any circumstances, subjects or qualifications where this may be unfair at a cohort level?

No it is not. A cohort acts like an individual. Pupils in different year group perform differently. Pupils in a year group are subject to different influences.
Pop culture, significant events in the community and globally can have an impact. If a year group contains a significant number of pupils who do not engage positively with the learning environment then the whole year group suffers detriment when it comes to a benchmark of their achievement.

9. **Overall, do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? Are there any benefits to certification based on teacher-judgement?**

Yes. The exams could not go ahead as planned. It would not have been possible to put in place all the mechanisms that are required and the people who are needed to support the system would not have been available. Yes, I would move away from a reliance on exams and move towards internal assessment. Teachers work very closely with pupils and make judgements on performance every day. Teachers are best placed to provide support for all pupils. Achievement across a greater range of tasks would be possible if there was less reliance on examinations too. A pupils’ performance of pupils across the year would give a better indication of their abilities in a wider range of activities.

10. **Do you have other suggestions on how to approach the challenges presented by this situation?**

The return to school will have to be done on a gradual basis. Pupils will not adhere to social distancing rules unless they are closely supervised. Schools are all very different in size and nature a plan that suits all will need to be devised to avoid confusion and mixed messages going out to the community.

It is incredibly difficult to keep surfaces clean in schools. Many materials need to be exchanged during teaching. Teachers, pupils and parents will need to have anti body tests before they can be allowed to congregate. The local authority I work for have been very clear that staff health and safety comes first. They have been hugely supportive.

Funding to support digital forms of education needs to be found. Many pupils who live in low SIMD areas do not have access to the resources they need to support their education. There is increasing reliance on the use of software and computer packages to teach and communicate with pupils and parents and partners. Teachers also need more training in the use of digital teaching platforms so that they can work from home.

There are so many possibilities, this experience should be seen as an opportunity to do things differently.

Catherine Nicol, Vice President, SSTA
EIS submission to Scottish Parliament Education Committee re SQA diet 2020

1. The EIS (Educational Institute of Scotland), Scotland’s largest teacher union representing over 60,000 teachers and lecturers, is pleased to submit this short paper to the Education and Skills Committee of the Scottish Parliament.

2. We have attached three Appendices which outline the communications we have issued to members and which succinctly capture our approach to ensuring that appropriate accreditation is achieved this year for students and pupils.

3. The absence of an exam diet clearly is a challenge for all concerned but the EIS has absolute trust in the ability of teachers and lecturers to exercise professional judgement in making the required estimates of student performance. The integrity of those estimates is crucial. The SQA extension of the deadline for submission is welcome as it facilitates a measured approach to the now critical estimates process, allowing for collaborative review at Centre and departmental level in the interests of the young people whose course assessment has been disrupted by the pandemic.

4. Looking forward, this experience has highlighted the risk of running a high-stakes, exam dependent qualification system. There are lessons to be learned as we plan not only for next session, when the threat of COVID 19 will remain live, but also planning beyond that to future proof qualifications against further potential pandemics.

5. For almost all pupils in S4, for example, their qualifications this year are primarily used to access the next level of qualification. Planning across a 2 year period, and looking to sit external qualifications at the point of school exit, would be an option for next session as schools will struggle to deliver the appropriate period of study if we are required to operate with reduced pupil attendance as a result of social distancing requirements.

6. Longer term, such an approach offers the opportunity for deeper learning and more progressive assessment approaches, as originally intended for the senior phase of CfE.

7. That is a discussion for a little later, however. For the moment, our young people need support from all concerned, including politicians, for the accreditation process we have put in play to reward and recognise their achievements this session.
Colleagues

Please find [here a link to the latest SQA statement](https://example.com) on the 2020 qualifications.

I am sure that there will be much discussion about the proposals, and there are aspects about which more information is still required; ultimately, any system to replace the normal diet of exams will have its challenges.

At the heart of the proposal for N5 (note that N5 coursework is now not to be marked), Higher and AH, is the need for teachers to exercise **professional judgement** in submitting evidence-based estimates for their students. The SQA advice is quite clear that **generating new evidence is not required** and should not be happening.

To support its statistical modelling approach, the SQA is asking that estimate bands be subdivided (presumably to assist in establishing the equivalent of grade boundaries) and, also, that departments create rankings in their cohorts.

Rankings were a part of the SQA procedures for many years and will be familiar to some but not all members.

What a ranking order does is create an anticipated spread of performance (usually based on hard evidence such as a prelim but critically not linked directly to estimates) which allows for a level of statistical adjustment to final awards. It was used, also, as part of the old appeals system.
Clearly at a time of school closures there are logistical issues to be resolved, although ranking was usually an exercise processed by the relevant PT. Further advice from SQA will be issued.

Applying a more differentiated estimate approach and re-introducing ranking, appears to be a belt and braces approach from the SQA which combined with looking at previous concordance between estimates and performance and, also, progression pathways from N5 grades to H grades, means that teacher estimates will have been subjected to a fairly rigorous moderation process which should mean that final awards have an added degree of validation and any undue pressure on teachers about estimates can be rebuffed more easily.

The re-establishment of a free post results service (an appeals process) is welcome, as this provides an external final arbiter for awards.

In relation to other awards which do not have an external exam, many of which are delivered by Colleges, the principle of professional judgement based on existing evidence is again centre stage, although the detail is not clear for all awards as some of them are linked to regulatory thresholds.

EIS FELA reps met online this week with SQA representatives and presented robust suggestions which not only sought to validate student achievement but was mindful also of the limitations imposed by the immediate circumstances of the COVID 19 lockdown on both students and lecturers.

As indicated in the SQA communication, further information and detail is required. EIS FELA, however, has established a dialogue with the SQA and will continue to feed views into future discussions.
The extension of deadline dates for submission is welcome, also, providing a little breathing space for consideration of existing candidate evidence and the preparation of estimates and cohort rankings.
Appendix 2

SQA - schools

The latest update from SQA can be found here.

Discussions are ongoing but it is clear that accreditation this year, for National Qualifications, will be founded on teacher professional judgement based on all the evidence available, including, but not exclusively, prelim results, classwork, marked assignments, completed coursework, etc.

The SQA will need to look at how the data can best be standardised but that is a significant discussion which is not yet concluded. The SQA Qualifications Contingency Group continues to meet.

A system wide buy-in to the results when they are published by employers, colleges and Universities, will be critical. The EIS starting point is that no pupil or student should be disadvantaged by circumstances which are beyond their control.

SQA – Colleges

Some college students sit National Qualifications such as Highers. However, many sit other types of SQA qualifications, including NCs, SVQs, HNCs and HNDs.

An SQA update for the college sector is due out today or tomorrow and will be posted on the website, as soon as it is available. EIS-FELA has submitted some suggestions to SQA about how matters should be processed and are seeking further dialogue. Underpinning the FELA suggestions is recognition that many students will be struggling to cope with the impact of COVID 19 on their personal lives and so it is critical that any accreditation approach should not add to the current pressures upon students.
Appendix 3

SQA FAQs

1. What is the critical factor in determining awards this year – estimates or the SQA’s statistical modelling?

Without doubt, the critical factor is the estimate submitted by a teacher based upon their professional judgement, using all available evidence and teacher knowledge of pupils. The focus must be on getting estimates right in the interests of students.

2. What is the statistical modelling for?

Primarily it is so that SQA can validate the awards made utilising professional judgement in order to boost confidence in the outcomes. Our view is that this may provide useful protection for teachers in the event of any heightened post-results scrutiny of their estimates by parents, students or SMTs.

3. What is involved in the modelling?

The EIS is not involved in any of the operational detail of the modelling but from our collective knowledge we can surmise that it will probably involve approaches such as looking at departments’ previous concordance between estimate and outcome (data from the past 3 years is being issued to schools to help the actual estimate process), analysing progression routes for previous awards to the next level, looking at distribution curves, etc.

4. Will the SQA overturn individual estimates?

The EIS view is that statistical modelling should be used only to bring added reassurance to the system, not to overturn professional judgements. If apparent anomalies are thrown up by analysis, that should trigger a professional dialogue between the SQA and Centre to ascertain the reason for any variation. It would be
disastrous to the integrity of the awards if professional judgements were being challenged on any significant scale.

Setting grade boundaries is not an exact science even when there is hard data in the shape of percentage marks; the EIS view is that it would be foolish to attempt such an exercise based on statistical modelling.

There is also a strong equity issue at play. Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds will have suffered most as a result of the lockdown, and given what we know of the impact of poverty on attainment many such pupils may be on the cusp of “grade boundaries” – it would be unacceptable for statistical modelling to deprive such pupils of awards which their teachers had judged them to be worthy of.

5. Can I simply submit estimates in the usual manner, rather than meet the new requirements?

The short answer is “No” as the new arrangement is to deal with the absence of exams as a result of COVID 19 and represents the sole basis upon which awards will be made this year. Not complying with them would risk No Awards being made for students. The decision to sub divide bands and to create a ranking order was made by the SQA. It is overly complex and perhaps indicates an insecurity on the part of the SQA regarding professional judgement. Having said that, the EIS cannot advise members not to adhere to the SQA guidelines as that would be tantamount to industrial action and would leave individuals and the union exposed, potentially, to legal action.

6. What happens if a student does not get the estimated award?

There will be a free appeals system. The SQA has yet to publish details as to how this will operate but clearly from a school’s perspective it will be based on the evidence which led to the estimate in the first place, and it is difficult to see how hard evidence would not prevail.
7. Should estimates be shared with pupils and parents?

Absolutely not. Estimates are different this year as they form the fundamental basis of the award. Post results, parents and pupils may access the estimates but at this stage in order to prevent undue pressure on teachers, estimates should not be shared. Local Authorities have legal advice available to them to support this position.

8. Should I be trying to generate new evidence to support estimates?

No. The SQA guidance makes clear that there is no need to carry out remotely additional prelims or assessments to support estimates. Indeed, it goes as far as to suggest that any improvement demonstrated in remotely generated material needs to be considered carefully. There is an important equity issue here as not all pupils will have equal access to the required IT equipment or have home circumstances which enable remote engagement.

9. Can I be instructed to go into school to prepare estimates?

No – schools are closed as places of work (apart from Hub centres). You cannot be instructed to attend there for the purpose of meetings etc.

It would be your decision as to whether you need to access any classroom materials. All the caveats around self-isolation, underlying health conditions, caring responsibilities, travel etc. are still applicable. The default therefore is that you should not be going into a school unless you deem it to be essential.

10. Can I go into school to collect evidence to support my estimates if I wish?

If you judge it to be essential to collect classroom evidence from your school, that may be possible providing that an adequate risk assessment (which should be conducted with the involvement of the School Rep and/ or Health and Safety
Reps) has taken place to ensure health and safety within the building (e.g. maximum numbers at any one time, sanitising measures in place, etc.) and, critically, that measures are in place to ensure social distancing is operational.

Any access must be discussed and agreed with school management / the Local Authority, taking full account of public health guidance. (In some areas local agreements / guidelines have been reached through the LNCT.)

In the event of any member being concerned that health and safety priorities are not being met in the context of the current social distancing and lockdown arrangements, they should raise the matter with the School Rep and/or Local Association Secretary as necessary.

11. What about the Government directive about essential work only?

Collecting or viewing the necessary SQA evidence to enable candidate awards would be essential work – nothing else would be however e.g. evidence for report writing. Any visit to a school building should be a one-off event.

12. Can I be asked to attend at school in order to facilitate meetings to discuss estimates?

No – all meetings should be facilitated remotely.

The only case for people going into buildings that are otherwise shut in the interests of public health and H&S, would be where teachers need essential evidence to devise estimates at home, as outlined above.

Any departmental review/moderation should be done online.

All other necessary meetings should be done virtually.

Where signatures are advised, digital signatures should be used.
13. What if our assessment records are not online?

Where assessment records are not currently online, PTs who are able to, could access departments to retrieve these and send electronically to teachers working at home. An SMT member or other designated person who can do so could agree to step in to access material within departments where PTs themselves are not able to.

14. What if I do not have adequate IT facilities at home?

The onus is on the school/local authority to provide any teachers who do not have it, with the necessary technology and software to enable the safe completion of estimates.
Education and Skills Committee

9th Meeting, 2020 (Session 5), Friday 1 May 2020

Summaries of views of young people

The Committee invited organisations representing young people to canvas views of young people and then to share their experiences and perspective on the cancellation of exams in 2020. The Committee offers its sincere thanks to these organisations and the young people who have shared their views.

- Scottish Youth Parliament, in partnership with Young Scot and YouthLink Scotland
- Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland
Scottish Youth Parliament, in partnership with Young Scot and YouthLink Scotland

SQA 2020 Exam Results Provisions for COVID-19 – Young People’s Perspectives

Background

The **Scottish Youth Parliament** (SYP) is the democratically elected voice of Scotland’s young people. Their vision for Scotland is of a nation that actively listens to and values the meaningful participation of its children and young people. SYP is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, particularly Article 12, which lays out young people’s right to be listened to on the issues that affect them, and for their views to be given weight.

**Young Scot** is the national youth information and citizenship charity for 11-26-year-olds in Scotland. They have been updating their dedicated website and social media channels seven days a week with the latest information for young people on COVID-19. This is helping to ensure that young people have quality-assured information on what's happening, the simple steps to take to help prevent catching COVID-19, and how to avoid spreading it to others.

**YouthLink Scotland** is the national agency for youth work. We're a membership organisation representing more than 100 youth organisation members across Scotland, including national voluntary organisations and all 32 local authorities. They champion the value of the youth work sector, challenging government at national and local levels to invest in youth work, which supports over 300,000 young people.

Approach

We welcome the opportunity to inform the Education and Skills Committee of young people’s views on the SQA 2020 Exam Result Provisions. This response is based on the findings of the **Lockdown Lowdown survey** alongside the views from specific SYP members and YouthLink Scotland volunteers.

The Scottish Youth Parliament, YouthLink Scotland and Young Scot partnered to deliver LockdownLowdown – a survey of young people from across Scotland on their concerns about COVID-19. The survey results give a clear picture of what young people are currently worried about – and the impact it’s having on their lives.

The survey received **2,419 responses** from young people aged 11-25 across Scotland, from all 32 local authorities and SYP’s 11 national voluntary organisations.

These findings are supplemented by the views of six of the Scottish Youth Parliament’s Education and Lifelong Learning (ELL) Committee members and one of YouthLink Scotland’s #iWill ambassador, who directly responded to the Committee’s additional questions. ELL Committee members were also encouraged to feed in any comments their constituents have on this topic.
Background information of survey respondents
The majority of respondents are at school (75%) and over half are aged 15-18 (52%). 65% of respondents are female, 31% are male, 1% identify as non-binary, and 1% identify in another way. 12.4% of respondents belong to minority ethnic groups.

1. Relevant Lockdown Lowdown Findings
   - Over two fifths (42%) stated that they were Extremely or Moderately concerned about school, college and university closures.
   - Respondents expressed more concern regarding exams and coursework, with around half (49%) stating that they were Moderately or Extremely concerned.
   - Over half of the respondents (58%) stated that they had some concern over their ability to access their rights.
   - Almost two thirds of respondents (61%) stated that they were Moderately or Extremely concerned about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on their future.
   - Respondents were given a list of six types of decision maker and asked who they thought should be providing information around coronavirus. The majority of respondents (87%) stated that Politicians should be providing information around coronavirus. Over half of the respondents selected Teachers (55%) and around a third selected Youth workers (34%). The least commonly selected group was Young people (selected by 22%).
   - Respondents were asked to provide examples of actions that they would like to see decision makers take to tackle issues surrounding coronavirus, 10% of respondents noted they’d like to see improvements to the current impact on education.

2. What are your main concerns regarding the impact of Coronavirus on assessment - this year there will be estimated grades (instead of completing coursework or exams this year)?

   The main concern raised by young people was around how estimated grades may penalise pupils who may have performed to a higher standard in exams. There was additional concern about the long-term impact this may have on young people’s future education and employment opportunities.

   ‘…there will be a lot of people who would have really buckled down with their revision and got much higher marks than anything they have evidence for, meaning that the grade they will get will not reflect their true potential. This could then in turn mean that they will struggle to move on to the next stage in their education/career.’

   ‘My main concern regarding covid-19 is, in fact, the attainment. A lot of young people may not be getting the result they may have done if they sat the exam. Predicted grades taken from a prelim at least three months before the final
exam will not allow any leeway for improvement in that time. This may have a serious impact on a lot of school leavers intending to head to university, college or other further education routes.'

‘...many people’s grades improve by the final exam. Due to this it’s caused worry that candidates wouldn’t get the grade that they would have potentially gotten in the final exam leading to potential further impact regarding conditional offers for universities and colleges.’

There was also concern raised around perceived potential bias from teachers and how this could impact pupils’ grades:

‘[The] main thing I’m hearing from [my MSYP] constituents is what if teachers are biased? How are they going to regulate this.’

‘[I’m] worried that it’s down to the individual decisions of teachers to recommend grades and how individual relationships with different teachers will impact this.’

‘I think that we have candidate numbers for a reason. Teachers might not always be fair…’

One young person noted their doubt around the appeals process being left in the hands of schools:

‘...with the appeals being from schools [and] not pupils I highly doubt that a school would go against their own teachers as it would hurt their credibility.’

Another highlighted their worry that current provisions will have a negative and disproportionate effect on pupils from disadvantaged schools/backgrounds:

‘[I] think that it could strongly disadvantage young people from certain schools/backgrounds. One part of the grading is the sqa looking into what the pupils in the school achieved previously however grades can change drastically between years depending on the students and the teacher teaching the class especially in smaller subject departments.’

3. Do you think the Scottish Government and SQA have taken the correct approach to certification given the physical closure of the schools? What would you do differently?

The majority of ELL Committee Members and #iWill ambassadors agreed that, whilst they do have concerns around elements of the current provisions, the Scottish Government and SQA took the correct approach to certification.

‘Myself and some of my constituents feel the approach could have been communicated to candidates a lot better however it was the best option that they could have came up with.’

‘Although using estimates from teacher might leave some students at a disadvantage I think it is the best way to ensure the majority of students get
the grades they deserve.’

‘During these times I think it is impossible to predict what will happen so delaying exams may not have been viable. I think estimating grades has many flaws but is the best way without holding exams.’

However, some of the Lockdown Lowdown respondents did note they disagreed with the current approach taken, expressing that decision makers should find a way to allow exams to take place as scheduled or at a later date.

‘…can we not just delay exams and sit them after this is all over. I don't feel what’s been suggested is fair, I feel I have wasted a year of study, not being given the opportunity to sit exams and better my prelim results.’

‘Find a way to make exams possible even if we may need to take them spread apart with masks and gloves on. I truly think this will allow young students to achieve the best grades possible and will reduce judgment from employees and universities accepting applications as they may be skeptical…Personally I want to know that the results I get in August are because I worked hard and put my all in to them.’

There was also criticism of the decision not to mark coursework:

‘I think that some evidence should have still been used because pupils feel that their hard work on coursework has gone to waste.’

‘Some students may see the SQA’s choice to not mark coursework as an easy alternative which will save time, effort and finance. However, this makes students feel as though their work is unimportant or even a waste of time and effort as it is not being formally assessed.’

‘I think that it’s frustrating that there’re not marking coursework in subjects where its very important – I do Design & Manufacture and coursework is what I’ve spent most of the year on but they’ve released a statement saying they wont mark it.’

Young people also felt that specific elements of the chosen approach could have been improved, including communications and involving young people in the decision making process.

4. How would you describe the communication and support provided to you during this time?

ELL Committee members and #iWill ambassadors generally felt that communication was ‘confusing’ and found the statements hard for young people to understand.

This correlates with the Lockdown Lowdown findings, with 7% of respondents noting they wanted to see more official communication around education and qualifications. Individual responses highlight that this is due to current guidance not being easily accessible, clear or understandable for young people.

In addition to this, respondents across our three sources noted that they were still confused around the provision for estimating grades. A few respondents also noted that this uncertainty was negatively impacting their mental health.
Several respondents highlighted that they were receiving ‘mixed messages’ from teachers, especially in regards to which elements coursework they should be completing.

‘I feel that there are many mixed messages being sent to pupils with some teachers still putting an expectation on them to complete and submit work for their use to produce estimates and others not. It also goes against what the SQA has said in numerous statements and makes times even more confusing.’

The fact that some Lockdown Lowdown respondents appeared to be under the impression that coursework may still count toward their final grade further demonstrates the confusion that exists.

There were also requests for:
- Clearer information around the appeals process
- Transparency around the Scottish Government and SQA’s decision making
- Full details of how grades will be assessed

Going forward, young people indicated they would like to receive information around SQA exam result provisions:
- In youth friendly, accessible formats
- Directly from their teachers
- On different platforms including TV announcement, social media and through online portals such as Google Classrooms and GLOW.

Only one young person mentioned their opinion of the support given, noting that:
‘The support on the other hand has been at a very high standard. Between teachers, the Scottish government and the SQA many constituents have found that they have been very open to questions.’

5. Do you have any other comments about the approach taken to the challenges presented by this situation? For example different impacts on different groups of young people, or impact on different subject areas?

Several young people felt that subjects with a more practical and coursework heavy workload may disproportionately feel the negative effect of the current provisions.

‘I fear more practical subjects will be at a disadvantage as it is perhaps harder to access’.

‘I think it impacts highly on more practical subjects because the pupils did not get to show their performance on one day after lots of preparation. These subjects are usually more hard to judge a mark for on the practical side without an examiner.’

‘I think that it’s really bad for people doing subjects where coursework is the main percentage of the assessment – a prelim and estimated grade doesn’t really give a fair representation. For subjects like maths with no coursework it isn’t really a problem’
There was also worry that this could have a bigger impact on future opportunities for 6th year pupils because they will not have the opportunity to retake subjects.

Furthermore, there was concern that young people from more deprived areas may feel an increased negative impact if previous attainment statistics are used by schools.

Contact us:

Should you wish to digitally meet with us or update us on how the findings will feed into your work, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us using the details below. We hope you have found this briefing to be informative and valuable.

Kirsty Morrison, Policy and Public Affairs Manager
28 April 2020

Dear Ms Adamson,

I write in advance of your meeting this Friday, 1 May 2020, in which I understand you are to take evidence from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

Our office has been engaging regularly with young people who were due to sit SQA examinations this year and are therefore affected by the cancellation of these exams. We wrote to the SQA on 14 April about our concerns and I attached the correspondence including SQA’s response.

In particular, a number of issues were raised by our Young Advisers Group (YAG) about the accessibility of information about the cancellation and alternative examination arrangements to young people and their families. They felt that this was causing increased anxiety and produced constructive suggestions on how to improve this, which we shared by e-mail with the SQA. I have attached these as a word document.

I hope that the attached information is useful and would appreciate it if you could share it with members of your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Megan Farr
Policy Officer
Dear Ms Robertson,

I am aware that our Digital Media Officer has been in touch with your Key Communications Manager this week about information produced by the SQA around changes to exams and whether this is/will be available in a format easily understood by the young people affected.

Kerry McMillan’s quick response was much appreciated, in which she indicated that the SQA is looking at engagement activities with ‘key audiences, including learners’, noting that the SQA’s ‘primary efforts have been focused on ensuring that practitioners are made aware of the next steps following cancellation of this year’s exams’. She went on to say that you are ‘now considering how these messages are translated for other key audiences such as parent, carers and learners’.

The Commissioner understands the considerable pressure the SQA will have been under to develop a robust response to an unprecedented situation, working under the pressure of a challenging timeframe whilst taking into account the needs of both practitioners and learners.

However, the Commissioner’s office has been hearing about and from young people who are suffering high levels of anxiety and distress in regard to the potential impact of these changes. They have raised a number of issues we would like to bring to your attention.

Communication
Children and young people have expressed disappointment that SQA has not seemed to have prioritised them in its communications so far, and have said they do not feel well informed about the proposed way in which their grades (and their futures) will be determined. We believe this distress could be at least partially alleviated by a recognition that children and young people should be SQA’s key priority in terms of communication. This would require more direct communication with young people: providing information in language that is young-person friendly, and more readily accessible—for example through the use of school communications channels and social media in addition to the SQA website.

Appeals
We are aware that traditionally the majority of appeals are initiated by teachers. However, given the unusual situation this year, that grades will be determined by those teachers, it will be important to ensure there is a distinct route of appeal for young people to use that does not rely on a teacher being asked to appeal their own determination. Actively communicating this and making it widely available and accessible to young people would support fair process and empower young people to take an active part in their education. This will be particularly important for those young people who may not have an adult in their lives who is able or willing to act on their behalf.
Involvement in decision making
Young people have also told us that they are keen to be involved in the work of the SQA, allowing you to benefit from their experiences and point-of-view, and for them to influence the decisions that are being made. Although timescales have not allowed for this in the formulation of the SQA’s immediate response to the current crisis, it does represent an opportunity for the SQA to consider and take forward how the organisation can meaningfully involve young people in support of their rights to participation (Art 12 UNCRC), and education (Arts 28 and 29 UNCRC).

We are aware that the Scottish Youth Parliament has offered to support the SQA in engaging with young people and would urge you to use their considerable expertise in both communications and engagement.

Finally, Kerry also helpfully told us that you are currently working on a dedicated section of your website to cover key topics and frequently asked questions, offering to send us a link once it is live to assist us in responding to questions received by our office from young people, their parents and carers. We would be happy to also share with you questions and concerns raised with us, if that would be helpful in developing the content of your website.

Yours sincerely,

Nick Hobbs
Head of Advice and Investigations
Dear Nick,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April 2020 regarding communications for young people during these unprecedented times.

Following the cancellation of the 2020 exam diet, I fully appreciate that many young people will be worried and it is therefore crucial that our messaging for them is accurate, reassuring and easy to understand. We continue to work through the details for this year across a wide range of qualifications delivered by schools, colleges and training providers.

1. Communication

We have received enquiries from teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and learners, and are working as quickly as possible to ensure appropriate answers are provided in audience-friendly formats.

We now have dedicated sections on our website to share SQA information during these difficult times. We will add information as and when it becomes available and will continue to enhance the pages based on user feedback.

Please visit www.sqa.org.uk/2020qualifications and www.sqa.org.uk/2020faqs

In addition, we will soon launch a specific learner section of the website and will keep you informed of this progress.

We are identifying themes coming through in the learner enquiries and currently producing information in young people-friendly formats, suitable for social media sharing. We will also provide schools with ready to use text via their own communications channels. We can of course share these with you and listen to any comments that you have from young people.

Over this and next week we are working with UCAS and Young Scot to provide answers to questions that young people have and share them via social media channels. In addition, we provided a simplified information sheet following our estimates announcement on Monday 20 April, to you and other learner organisations, as well as the National Parent Forum Scotland, Connect and the Scottish Government’s parental engagement network.

We continue to work with key parent, carer and learner organisations to ensure that information is provided in clear, audience-friendly formats.
2. **Appeals**
There will be a free appeal process this year where, following discussion with their learners, teachers and lecturers will be able to question the grade awarded. We will ensure that details are shared in accessible language and formats to ensure everyone fully understands this process.

3. **Involvement in decision making**
Before the Covid-19 outbreak we started work on our ‘Learner Strategy’, to enable us to work more closely with young people in a more meaningful way and bring together the numerous strands of learner engagement activity that we already undertake.

Following the very positive engagement with young people on our Assessment Futures Panel, we are in the process of inviting a young person to join our Qualifications Committee. This committee gives technical, strategic and policy advice regarding our qualifications and will be really important over the coming months as a mechanism to provide advice to our Board.

We will continue to work with the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot, Carers Trust Scotland and UCAS to ensure our learner-friendly messages have maximum impact.

I understand that Kerry McMillan has already received the questions and concerns raised with you and continues to stay in contact with your office. We look forward to working with you in doing our best to alleviate any stress and anxiety that Scotland’s young people may be feeling.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Robertson Chief Executive
Education and Skills Committee

9th Meeting, 2020 (Session 5), Friday 1 May 2020

Submissions pack

The Convener wrote to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills regarding the Covid-19 and its impact on education and children and young people. The letter from the Convener and the responses from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills include a large number of questions and answers that relate to the cancellation of the 2020 Exam Diet, which is relevant context for the evidence session with the SQA. This correspondence can be read below.

- **Annexe 1:** Letter from the Convener to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, 26 March 2020
- **Annexe 2:** Response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, 14 April 2020
- **Annexe 3:** Second Response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, 24 April 2020
COVID-19

As you know, given the most recent public health measures adopted by the Parliament, the Committee was unable to take evidence from you yesterday regarding the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on matters falling under your remit. As you will appreciate, the Committee has a number of questions, many of which stem from queries raised by concerned teachers and other school staff, school pupils, students, parents, those working in the ELC sector and those involved in further and higher education.

I know that the situation, and therefore the advice given and measures taken, is continuously developing and is subject to close monitoring. Therefore, the answers to these questions may well have changed since your last updates to Parliament and will continue to change and evolve in a short space of time. I should also note that the Committee recognises and appreciates the immense effort being made across Government, local authorities and in each individual sector to address these issues at a time when every individual is also grappling with the impact of the virus.

In the absence of the ability to meet in person to explore these issues, the Committee is keen to seek answers to these questions in writing, both to provide clarity and reassurance to those contacting us as well as highlighting to the Scottish Government particular issues which require further exploration.

The Committee as a whole is seeking answers to the key questions set out below. These are organised into four key areas – early learning and childcare; schools; colleges, universities and modern apprenticeships; and child protection and wellbeing.
Early learning and childcare
- How is the Scottish Government supporting local authorities to work with private and third sector providers of ELC in their areas?
- Whether childminders are or will be expected to provide places for children of critical workers and vulnerable children?
- Whether the Scottish Government is planning to delay the expansion of ELC and if it plans to legislate for such a delay?

Schools
- What early information are you receiving on the extent to which local authorities are managing to ensure free school meals are provided to those that need it including through hubs?
- What action do you consider local authorities should be taking if there is evidence of low uptake in these meals, which suggests they are not reaching those in need?
- Is the SQA developing new methods of certification for all of its qualifications that require an external exam or is it prioritising certain subjects or qualifications?
- What have local authorities done to identify and support digitally excluded households?
- What planning is taking place in relation to the next academic year, should schools remain closed or if additional time is required to mitigate the school closures?
- What is your view on the proposal to recruit online tutors to assist children who are learning at home?

Colleges, universities and modern apprenticeships
- How is the Scottish Government supporting universities and colleges to continue teaching and, where necessary, research activities?
- Is the Scottish Government or Scottish Funding Council undertaking modelling work on the economic impact on colleges and universities of the pandemic?
- What work is Skills Development Scotland undertaking to assess the impact of the coronavirus on apprenticeship schemes?

Child protection and wellbeing
- What measures are in place in care homes and secure accommodation to support children in these establishments both in terms of keeping them healthy and supporting their education.
- How can local authorities ensure that vulnerable children are identified and attend the school/ELC provision?
• How will the day-to-day work of children’s social work and children’s hearings be supported while social distancing measures are in place?

• What should a family do if they consider the additional support needs of their children are not being met through homeschooling?

In addition to these questions from the Committee as a whole, as the Committee may not have an opportunity to meet for some time, I have also given members the opportunities to set out their individual questions and these are in the annexe of this paper. As you can see, members are seeking to represent people in many and varied situations during this difficult time.

The Committee would normally set a timescale for response to its letters of a month. However, in the current circumstances many of these questions require a response as soon as is practicable. Could I therefore request that responses are sent in batches as and when they are ready as opposed to waiting for all answers to be finalised and collating into one long response to a longer timescale.

Hopefully this approach, combined with your ability to send relevant questions to the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Education Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, Student Awards Agency Scotland, amongst others to provide responses, will mean responses can be received, published and circulated by the Committee, in as timely a way as possible. Wherever you consider there is an overlap in these questions, please feel free to provide one response to multiple questions.

I have also included a link below to the questions received direct from teachers and others seeking clarification that could be addressed by the SQA or central government. These have been distilled down into the questions in Annexe A. The Committee is not seeking individual responses to each of the questions from individuals. However, the Committee has published them, sent them to the SQA and also sent them to you. They provide valuable context on the basis for the Committee’s questions, including the specifics of the circumstances people are facing.

https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Inquiries/qualifications_questions.pdf

Finally, can I thank you for sending the Clerk to the Committee all relevant publications that may provide people with guidance and assurances at this time. The Committee has published them today in a reference section on its dedicated website. As stated in my letter last week, the Committee wants to act as conduit to get information and support to those who need it at this time. Please continue to send such information as it issues and we will publish and circulate it straight away.

Yours sincerely

CLARE ADAMSON MSP
CONVENER
ANNEXE A – Questions from individual members

JAMIE HALCRO JOHNSTON MSP

1. **Distance learning**
   1.1 Existing resources like Glow allow teachers to engage in distance learning with their pupils. I have received reports that some of these resources are experiencing pressures, particularly during peak times. Will the Cabinet Secretary look into the availability and capacity of these resources on a national level and are any new resources planned?

   1.2 Given that some teachers may be relatively unfamiliar with existing distance learning systems, is there any availability of training or support resources for them? Can they, for example, access a telephone helpline to assist.

   1.3 Will any direction be given from central government on measures that should be undertaken to promote distance learning, particularly from pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds? There may, for example, be pupils who do not have access to an internet connection at home and may find using online resources difficult.

2. **Ability to undertake continuing coursework and assessments**

   2.1 Will work being undertaken with the Chief Examining Officer give clear guidance on outstanding coursework for pupils in the senior phase? While some coursework may be completed from home, some will require practical projects and use of specialist equipment only available in a school building. Will this be taken into account in terms of evidence for certification?

   2.2 National 4 assessments have previously been conducted, under supervision, in a school setting, regardless of them being open-book assessments. Can these assessments be undertaken by pupils remotely?

3. **Results under the alternative certification model**

   3.1 For marks made under the alternative certification model being devised, will there be additional routes of appeal. Will a pupil be able to retake a full examination at a later date without being disadvantaged by an award issued now?

   3.2 I was contacted by the parent of a young person who is currently studying towards a National 5 or equivalent qualification, with a private tutor and was due to sit an examination through a local university. The constituent was informed that the SQA would not accept feedback from the private tutor, despite having sat a prelim exam privately under exam conditions. Is this an accurate reflection of the SQA’s position and what further evidence can be provided in cases like these to ensure that a person’s ability is reflected under the proposed alternative certification model?

   3.3 Where a child is ill with suspected coronavirus, Government advice is currently for the household to isolate with no need to call 111 or seek other medical
support unless symptoms worsen. What evidence can be provided to show that a child has been unwell if required?

4. **Further education colleges**

4.1 What discussions has the Scottish Government had with further education colleges about qualifications and distance learning at this stage, and has their approach been satisfactory?

**ROSS GREER MSP**

**Coursework & Evidencing:**
The SQA have stated that Higher & Advanced Higher coursework submissions are not required but that completed coursework can be used as part of the suite of evidence which will determine grades. To clarify, does this mean that the SQA will not uplift any coursework from schools post Friday 20\(^{th}\) March?

If this is not the case and uplift of any available evidence is planned, will deadlines remain the same?

If the regular uplift is not going ahead, will completed coursework be collected by the SQA and marked at a later date, for example to assess against predicted grades submitted by teachers/lecturers or as part of an appeals process?

If coursework is not to be uplifted and instead used as evidence of teacher judgement in the issuing of predicted grades, should coursework completed after Friday 20\(^{th}\) March be considered by teachers (presuming it can be safely submitted, ie online)?

If coursework completed after Friday 20\(^{th}\) March is admissible evidence, how will equity be achieved in the issuing of grades between those who are able to complete further coursework from home and those who are not, for reasons of illness, self-isolation, living situation, lack of resources such as an internet connection etc? How will this latter group not be disadvantaged?

Many pupils were sent home with coursework, portfolios etc. on Friday 20\(^{th}\) March. If these are to be used as evidence, has clear communication gone directly to pupils, as well as to staff, to ensure that they do not dispose of evidence which they may now believe is of no further use?

If coursework completed after Friday 20\(^{th}\) is not admissible evidence, how will this be verified in the situations where students took the coursework home that week and may now, with the best of intentions, continue to work on it ahead of submission?

What is the advice on college students completing assessments via distance learning, given it is not completed under the proscribed supervised conditions? Closed book assessments cannot be done but even open book is supposed to be supervised, which is clearly not possible. [also asked by Jamie Halcro-Johnston]

When will the SQA clarify exactly what evidence is required?
Many college courses are modular and some simply do not produce evidence throughout the year. With modules uncompleted and a lack of evidence, on what basis are lecturers to issue estimated grades?

Coursework completed with the assistance of a tutor being used as evidence in a far more consequential manner than normal will give students in this privileged position a disproportionate advantage. How can this be taken into account when in many cases teachers are not even aware that their student has a tutor?

**Evidencing & Teacher/Lecturer Judgement:**

What verification process will be in place for the teacher/lecturer issuing of predicted grades?

Is the fire in Peebles going to be taken into account when their grades are decided as this has undoubtedly affected their ability to achieve grades? Coursework was lost in fire

College students often do not attend every class due to personal reasons, which is accepted. Some courses do not sit prelims. Focus is more on final exam. How are lecturers to evidence professional judgement with less coursework?

When will teachers/lecturers be expected to submit predicted grades to the SQA?

What allowances will be made if teachers/lecturers are unable to access evidence ie because schools continue to be closed, students took portfolios home and are unable to return them etc?

What measures will be put in place to protect teachers, whose professional judgement will this year have a disproportionate impact on their pupils?

How will the weight being placed on a teacher’s professional judgement take into account situations in which individual teachers are not aware of a pupils’ circumstances? What role will guidance/pastoral teachers play? As an example, a pupil who did poorly in his prelims was diagnosed days before schools closed with anxiety and depression. Only their guidance teacher is aware of their diagnosis at present.

**Prelims:**

How will prelim exams be used as part of the body of evidence on which grades are based?

How will the use of prelim exams take into account the significant differences in the time at which they are sat, sometimes of up to four months?

Will prelim exam papers be quality-assured to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged for having take a poor quality prelim?

For National 5 candidates, the DFM removed the need for unit assessments for those who would be sitting the final exam, so there is very little verifiable evidence available,
particularly in subjects such as Maths. What will be considered evidence in these situations?

**Exams:**

Will an exam be offered at a later date for those not happy with result, (as is the case in England)?

Some of our (university) students are concerned about being known as the "COVID graduates", with employers knowing that they didn't have to sit the same exams as other years. What can be done to ensure that this year's students can demonstrate to potential employers that their qualifications carry the same rigour as those from other years. Universities have the autonomy and skills to manage this, but do colleges have the flexibility to create and implement alternative assessments at short notice?

**Appeals:**

What appeals process will be available to students who are not awarded the grade they feel they deserve? (also asked by Jamie Halcro-Johnston and Beatrice Wishart)

Will any appeals process include a financial cost, similar to the current charge for re-marking exam papers?

**Admissions:**

Will university/college grade boundaries be affected by pupils not actually sitting exams?

What discussions have the SQA and Scottish Government had with Universities/Colleges Scotland regarding this?

Will Access courses be going ahead and if so, when will the application process open?

Please see a specific example below:

“My son has 2 higher qualifications and 4 Nat 5’s. He has just completed 6th year (unexpectedly) and needs further qualifications to go on to Uni as he plans. We have identified an Access course at a university for which school leavers are accepted. It is a part-time course which costs £500 in fees. This is normally would be funded by SAAS in our circumstances but Access funding and the application process has not yet opened. I wonder if you could advise me whether to pay the £500 fees upfront to secure a placement for him and try to recuperate later, even though this would be highly risky for me at the moment.”

**Miscellaneous**

With exams cancelled, what measures are in place to ensure that pupils attain the learning outcomes of their courses, even if they are not assessed in the normal way?
Have the SQA consulted learners in the process of making these arrangements thus far and what plans are there to consult learners before confirming final arrangements?

BEATRICE WISHART MSP

- Given that isolation from the outside world is a tactic many domestic abuse perpetrators deploy, and that Adverse Childhood Experiences can be lifelong, how can we protect children that are living in a domestic abuse household during this lock-down? What action can be taken to ensure that children in those households receive educational support?

- Currently SAAS have stated that payments will continue until May. If students need to return to university to complete units later in the summer, will SAAS be able to extend financial support?

- Will final year nursing students who are called up to work be required to complete further summative course work that will form part of their degree grade during this time? What guarantee can be given that their course outcomes will not be detrimentally impacted by working for the NHS during this crisis?

- What is the situation for (a) current probationers (including those on the flexible route) (b) supply teachers (c) supply teachers with a contracted agreement with schools (d) teachers on rolling one year contracts and those currently waiting to hear about jobs starting in August who are neither permanent with a school or council.

QUESTIONS FROM UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND – SUBMITTED BY A NUMBER OF MEMBERS

1. In light of the potentially very serious impact of COVID-19 on universities’ sustainability, does the Scottish Government recognise the scale of financial risk facing universities, across all of their activities; and can the Scottish Government reassure Scotland’s 19 universities that it will commit the resources to support institutions’ financial sustainability, reduce permanent damage and lay the foundations for the sector to contribute as strongly as possible to Scotland’s recovery and success?

2. Can the Scottish Government give an assurance that whatever decision is taken about the fee status of EU undergraduate students due to start at Scottish universities in 2021/22, that the sum of funding that would have gone to universities to support this type of provision will not be removed from higher education in AY 2021/22 given the highly destabilising combination of financial factors that universities are facing across every aspect of their business as a result of COVID-19?

3. Universities are not closed and are providing “essential” services to many thousands of students still in accommodation, key research and testing and
other COVID-19 related work. The discretion for local councils to interpret the Scottish Government’s guidance on three categories of key workers creates the possibility of inconsistency across Scotland and increased bureaucracy as universities deliver services across multiple Councils. Can there be a move to greater consistency?
4 April 2020

Dear Clare

COVID 19

Thank you for your letter of 26 March about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Scottish education. As you recognised in your letter, it is a fluid situation and the advice and action that the Scottish Government and the Scottish education sector is taking is developing from day to day. It has not been possible, therefore, to answer all of the questions immediately. However, as you requested, I will provide responses in batches, with the first batch attached to this letter. These responses build on my letter to the Committee of 3 April about the Scottish Government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.

I will aim to provide responses to the remaining questions as soon as possible.

JOHN SWINNEY
Early learning and childcare

How is the Scottish Government supporting local authorities to work with private and third sector providers of ELC in their areas?

The Scottish Government is looking carefully at measures which can support the childcare sector through this challenging time, recognising that it is a varied sector with a large number of small businesses, social enterprises, third sector organisations and self-employed workers.

Emergency Childcare

On 19 March 2020 I announced that most local authority schools and nurseries in Scotland would be closing from the end of the school day on Friday 20 March 2020, as part of the Scottish Government’s response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. In my statement, I also made clear that provision for children within school and childcare settings would continue to be required for the following priority groups:

- Vulnerable children who often rely on childcare settings and school life for hot meals or for a safe and comforting space.
- The children of key workers who will require continuing access to appropriate learning and childcare that allows their parents or carers to participate in the national response to Covid-19.

Private, third sector and independent childcare providers, including nurseries and out of school care services, will have closed from 20 March 2020, unless they are involved in the provision of emergency childcare for key workers and vulnerable children.

We have strongly encouraged local authorities to involve private and third sector childcare providers, including out of school care and childminders, in delivering critical provision. This may mean that these providers are involved in local arrangements for school-aged children as well as younger children.

To support this, the Care Inspectorate has produced registration contingency plan guidelines for childcare settings continuing to operate to provide emergency childcare for key workers and vulnerable children.

Support for childcare providers during closure period

The ongoing sustainability of the childcare sector is of paramount importance to the Scottish Government. All private and third sector providers who provide funded ELC in their settings will continue to receive payments from their local authority for these funded ELC hours. Local authorities will be in contact with providers to confirm local arrangements for these payments.

We have published guidance on the business and financial support available to private and third sector childcare providers and to childminders on gov.scot.

Private and third sector providers will be able to access the following support measures:

- Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
- Business Support Fund
• **Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme**; and
• **Statutory Sick Pay Rebate**

Under the **Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme** all UK employers with a PAYE scheme can access support to safeguard workers from being made redundant. A suite of guidance information relevant to the sector has also been published including information for parents and carers, childcare providers and social distancing guidance specific to those working in education and childcare.

We are using our dedicated Knowledge Hub groups to share information and provide a discussion forum space for local authorities and providers, and using social media to highlight key messages and signpost resources to the sector.

Both the Minister for Children and Young People and the Scottish Government team are in regular contact with the childcare sector representative bodies to share the latest information and work through specific concerns raised by members.

**Whether childminders are or will be expected to provide places for children of critical workers and vulnerable children?**

The Scottish Government issued a guidance note to all registered childminders on 25 March which stated that registered childminders are strongly advised to cease all provision apart from critical childcare provision for key worker families and vulnerable children until further notice. Where possible, critical provision should be delivered as part of a coordinated local authority-led emergency response. Feedback so far indicates that many local authorities are using childminders, who wish to continue to provide childcare for key worker families, as part of their emergency response.

If providing childcare for key worker families and/or vulnerable children, childminders are strongly advised to limit the number of households for whom they provide childcare to a maximum of two, other than their own. Where childminders are working with more than two families over the course of the week, it is advised that they consider additional cleaning measures to reduce risk of transmission. These measures are intended to reduce the risk of transmission between households.

**Whether the Scottish Government is planning to delay the expansion of ELC and if it plans to legislate for such a delay?**

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (Modification) (No. 2) Order 2019, was passed by the Parliament on 1 April and has the effect of removing the statutory duty on education authorities to make 1140 hours of early learning and childcare (ELC) available to each eligible child from 1 August 2020.

The Scottish Government and COSLA have made this difficult decision jointly, recognising that the ongoing response to the Covid-19 pandemic means that much of the work planned for this summer to enable roll out of the 1140 hours expansion cannot now go ahead, as construction projects cease, recruitment and induction of additional staff is put on hold, and local authorities concentrate on the urgent task of providing critical childcare for those who need it most.

We remain firmly committed to the rollout of our transformational 1140 hours expansion, and the benefits we know it will bring to our children and families, and wish to see this delivered as soon as is practicable. This change represents a re-phasing of the expansion programme only; our ambition remains unchanged. At this point, we cannot reasonably assess when full delivery may be achievable and will not be able to do so until the extent and duration of the impacts of the pandemic...
are clear. We will work together through the Joint Delivery Board to bring forward new implementation proposals at the appropriate time, including an assessment of the resource requirements of new and/or revised proposals. This will allow Scottish Ministers to bring legislation back to the Scottish Parliament to secure 1140 hours entitlement for all children and most importantly to make expanded ELC a reality for families.

**Schools**

What early information are you receiving on the extent to which local authorities are managing to ensure free school meals are provided to those that need it including through hubs?

As I highlighted to you in my letter of 23 March we had received returns from local authorities on 18 March which showed a breadth of potential solutions were being considered by local authorities to ensure continued provision of free school meals including food vouchers or cash payments, continuing to use school catering facilities, and delivery of food items. We are continuing to liaise with local authority partners on their delivery of free school meals through daily calls with directors of local authority services, and the Chief Inspector has asked local authorities to provide a further update on delivery services this week. The intelligence from the daily calls is showing us that local authorities are carefully assessing local need and circumstances against latest health protection advice, and doing all that they can to ensure continued provision to those eligible children and young people.

Additionally, as part of our daily reporting by local authorities on attendance, we are receiving data returns from local authorities on the number of vulnerable children who have been attending schools across the country in order to receive a free school meal. Returns are highlighting an increasing number of children are attending schools in order to receive a free school meal.

What action do you consider local authorities should be taking if there is evidence of low uptake in these meals, which suggests they are not reaching those in need?

There will be multiple factors for local authorities to take into account to ensure continued provision within their local area, this might mean that a local authority needs to put in place specific measures to reach particularly remote or rural communities, rather than a single solution across a local authority area. The guidance that my officials issued to local authorities on 26 March reiterated this and recognised that local authorities would need to be mindful of latest health protection advice when implementing services for free school meal provision. The guidance included a number of potential service delivery options that local authorities could consider in order to reach all eligible children and young people – direct cash payments (as seen in Edinburgh), provision of food vouchers (as seen in Glasgow), delivery of food items in partnership with community groups (as seen in East Ayrshire) and collection of either a packed lunch or attend a hot meal in a school (seen in multiple local authorities).

Is the SQA developing new methods of certification for all of its qualifications that require an external exam or is it prioritising certain subjects or qualifications?

We are in unprecedented times and it is important to be clear that decisions in relation to school closures and cancellation of the exam diet were taken on public health grounds, based on scientific advice. The decision was taken to ensure the safety of
young people, their families and friends, and their wider community – in particular those who fall into higher risk categories.

While necessary, the Scottish Government is very aware that cancellation of the diet presents a number of challenges for those who had anticipated completing courses and sitting exams, for parents and carers, and for teachers and lecturers.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is taking steps to refine the existing system and ensure it is as fair and robust as possible. This will allow a certification model to be used to award qualifications and so ensure that young people are not disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

In a statement issued on 2 April the Chief Examiner set out that teachers are asked to provide their judgement of estimated grades for pupils and the ranking of pupils within their estimated grade boundary. This should be provided to SQA by 29 May which, with the support of the system, should then enable the awarding of qualifications by 4 August.

The Chief Examiner has been clear that every effort is being made to ensure that with the support from the system awards can be made by 4 August, and further details will set out how they will certificate qualifications this year as soon as possible.

Where pupils are not satisfied with their estimated grades, the Chief Examiner has set out that the Post Results Service will be in operation and there will be no associated charge for accessing it. Further guidance will be issued regarding this.

There are no plans to hold any exams before the 2021 exam diet.

The Chief Examiner has confirmed that schools and colleges are not required to submit learner coursework for marking for Higher and Advanced Higher courses. It has also been confirmed that where coursework has been submitted for National 5 qualifications, it will now not be able to be marked as this cannot be achieved in a safe and secure manner.

The SQA has also set out further guidance confirming that the awarding of National 2, 3, and 4 qualifications, free standing units at SCQF level 5, 6 and 7, as well as National Certificates, national Progression Awards, and Skills for Works courses and awards will go ahead.

What have local authorities done to identify and support digitally excluded households?

Local authorities are taking a range of approaches to identifying and supporting digitally excluded households. For example, issuing devices to the most disadvantaged families, assigning school work through paper based packs and providing connectivity guides showing how to connect to learning through mobile phones or games consoles.

A small number of local authorities have already (pre-Covid-19) issued devices to large proportions of their school populations but this provision is not universal across the country. At least one local authority is working with local telecoms partners to ensure connectivity for the most disadvantaged families.

Other measures are being taken across the country are set out below.

The Department of Culture Media and Sport has agreed measures with both fixed line and mobile operators to meet the needs of vulnerable customers. Fixed line operators have agreed to remove usage caps, while landline and mobile operators have agreed
to put measures in place for vulnerable customers, for example by offering additional data at low prices and free voice calls.

Vulnerable customers and those self-isolating will receive alternative methods of communication wherever possible if priority repairs to a fixed broadband service or a landline cannot be carried out.

Mobile Network Operators have additionally ‘zero rated’ NHS pages therefore access to these pages by customers will not use up data allowances.

Scottish Government officials have begun engagement with businesses and the third sector to explore what can be done to support the digitally excluded at this time to ensure they can access essential services.

**What planning is taking place in relation to the next academic year, should schools remain closed or if additional time is required to mitigate the school closures?**

Planning is underway, and I will provide a more detailed update on progress as part of my next response.

**What is your view on the proposal to recruit online tutors to assist children who are learning at home?**

The Reform Scotland paper raises some important issues around educational continuity that Scottish Government and Education Scotland are already considering, along with our partners in local authorities. In fact, much of what is proposed in the paper is very much in line with work that is planned or is already being undertaken.

Education Scotland is working closely with local authority counterparts and is in regular discussion with Directors of Education. We will continue to keep the situation under review. If an apparent need emerges through that engagement, we will consider in due course.

### Child protection and wellbeing

**What measures are in place in care homes and secure accommodation to support children in these establishments both in terms of keeping them healthy and supporting their education?**

**Residential Child Care**

The residential child care sector is working diligently to support the education and health needs of the children and young people in their care, and has been in close contact with local authorities and the Scottish Government about arising issues.

There has been a focus on ensuring safe staffing ratios and supporting staff to implement social distancing measures within these care settings which, first and foremost, are these children’s homes.

It is also important that children and young people’s mental health is supported at this challenging time. As part of that social workers, carers and staff in the residential care sector are working to ensure children and young people are encouraged to maintain contact with their friends and families, wherever it is safe to do so in line with existing social work risk assessments. This includes contact via media platforms and also finding creative ways for children to keep in touch, e.g. writing letters or cards to their families.
The Scottish Government will soon be issuing additional guidance for local authorities and agencies on caring for Looked After children, young people, and care leavers in different care settings, including residential care, and welcomes continued discussions with the sector to ensure that all looked after young people receive the support they need.

**Secure Care**

All five secure centres have robust service continuity and contingency plans in place. These are actively reviewed and updated as new information and guidance becomes available. All 5 centres have some staff absent due to self-isolation. This is an ongoing issue, but the centres are managing to cope at time of writing. Staff in centres are working well together, being creative by shortening the school day and offering more remote digital learning – including GLOW resources - to ease staffing pressures. A guide for children and young people has been developed by Kibble – and that has been shared across all independent centres to adopt and adapt as necessary.

Staff have access to PPE and are able to care for the young people in isolation. There have been 6 young people across all the centres who have been in isolation in recent times. All these young people have been tested for Coronavirus, with every test to date returning negative.

All five centres are in daily contact with Scottish Government officials. There is a weekly tele-conference with Heads of secure care services, Scottish Government, the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and Scotland Excel. This is an opportunity to raise concerns, share ideas and suggestions, discuss new guidance and hear how other services are managing.

**How can local authorities ensure that vulnerable children are identified and attend the school/ELC provision?**

The overall position remains that, if pupils can learn safely at home, they should. However, we know that some children and young people rely upon the care and protection provided by schools and other agencies in relation to a range of circumstances. Vulnerable children may be vulnerable for a range of reasons including: being on the child protection register; looked after; on the edge of care; being eligible for Free School Meals; having complex additional support needs; or being affected by poverty and deprivation. Where appropriate, local authorities will need to ensure and prioritise continued care and support for these pupils during the period of school closure.

We have written formally to local authorities to provide clear guidance that in plans for supporting young people, they and their partners prioritise the needs of those who experience deprivation, those who have complex additional support needs, and those who are looked after, at risk of coming into care, and those on the child protection register.

**How will the day-to-day work of children’s social work and children’s hearings be supported while social distancing measures are in place?**

**Child Protection**

Covid-19 guidance which supplements the National Guidance for Child Protection in Scotland 2014 was published and disseminated on 30 March, intended to support the leadership already being demonstrated in this area. It has been developed in response to the issues identified by local partnerships and is provided for Chief Officers,
professional leaders in children’s services and Child Protection Committees, who should ensure it is taken account of within their partnerships.

The guidance reflects that child protection is part of a continuum of collaborative responsibilities upon agencies working with children. This critical area continues to require good professional judgement, based on assessment and evidence, informed by the perspectives of the team around the child, including the child and family. The guidance provides advice about streamlining current processes to take account of current challenges without compromising actions to protect children, and notes the critical role of Chief Officers in demonstrating collective leadership in the current situation.

This guidance will be kept under review and updated as necessary as the pandemic develops in discussion with stakeholders. The Scottish Government welcomes continued dialogue with the sector, particularly in relation to further issues that may emerge, to assist us to identify where additional actions or support may be needed. Please get in touch by email at Child_Protection@gov.scot

We know that a range of innovative practice is already emerging across local areas and professional networks are encouraged to share their developing approaches. Examples of local Covid-19 operational guidance are available on the Social Work Scotland website at https://socialworkscotland.org/latest-updates-on-covid-19/ and the Covid-19 protection and safeguarding plans of a number of areas are also accessible to Directors of Education and Children’s Services through the ADES website. We do not underestimate the scale of the challenge at the current time, and would like to reiterate that support is on offer from the Scottish Government and national agencies to local areas if needed.

Children’s hearings

Children’s hearings arrangements will support the public health response, by reducing the requirement for physical attendance at children’s hearings whenever possible, reducing the risk to children and families, staff, Panel Members, and partners.

Daily updates are provided by SCRA and Children’s Hearings Scotland to Scottish Government officials about the pandemic’s impact on families, volunteers and staff. A full statement, regularly updated, is hosted on both bodies’ websites. SCRA offices and hearings centres remain closed. Children, young people, their families and anyone else who would usually attend a children’s hearing should not travel to the hearing’s centres. Email addresses and contact details for each of SCRA local teams are available.

Only those hearings required for the urgent and immediate protection of children are taking place. All non-essential hearings have been cancelled and will be rescheduled at a later date where necessary. SCRA are now operating hearings remotely using VScene technology. Interim arrangements are being made to protect children by maintaining the legal status quo. SCRA and CHS are working at great speed to test out and roll out the necessary technology to enable fuller hearings to take place. They hope in the coming weeks to implement a plan that sets out how to enable the participation of professionals, e.g. social workers, children’s advocacy, legal representatives and safeguarders across Scotland, and how these professionals support the participation of families and children.
Further provisions of direct relevance to child protection, foster and kinship care, children’s hearings and secure care have been developed for inclusion in the Coronavirus (Scotland) Bill 2020 passed on 1 April. 

Guidance for affected staff and volunteers on the emergency legislation is available here https://www.chip-partnership.co.uk/2020/04/06/guidance-coronavirus-scotland-act-2020/

What should a family do if they consider the additional support needs of their children are not being met through home-schooling?

One of our key priorities is to ensure that vulnerable children and young people continue to benefit from the learning, care and support that schools and nurseries provide for them.

We have been working with local authorities to ensure they have plans in place to support continuity of education and support for children and young people who are learning at home, taking into account the needs of children and young people in their area.

To identify what additional support may be available in their area.

We will continue to work with local authorities and other partners as this support develops to ensure that children and young people continue to be supported with their learning.

Questions from Individual Committee Members

JAMIE HALCRO JOHNSTON MSP

2. Ability to undertake continuing coursework and assessments

2.1 Will work being undertaken with the Chief Examining Officer give clear guidance on outstanding coursework for pupils in the senior phase? While some coursework may be completed from home, some will require practical projects and use of specialist equipment only available in a school building. Will this be taken into account in terms of evidence for certification?

Answer

The Chief Examining Officer has confirmed that schools and colleges are not required to submit learner coursework for marking for Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

The SQA has also confirmed that N5 coursework already submitted will now not be marked.

2.2 National 4 assessments have previously been conducted, under supervision, in a school setting, regardless of them being open-book assessments. Can these assessments be undertaken by pupils remotely?

Answer

The SQA has set out that schools and colleges should provide unit results based on either existing evidence from assessments that have already been completed, and/or using their professional judgement of other learner evidence, including their knowledge of their learners, their progress and achievements to date.
Results under the alternative certification model

3.1 For marks made under the alternative certification model being devised, will there be additional routes of appeal. Will a pupil be able to retake a full examination at a later date without being disadvantaged by an award issued now?

**Answer**

The SQA has stated that the Post Results Service will be in operation this year and there will be no charge for appeals made under it. SQA will issue further guidance as to how this will operate.

If pupils are not satisfied with their calculated grades and the results of any appeal then they would be able to sit exams as part of the 2021 Diet.

3.2 I was contacted by the parent of a young person who is currently studying towards a National 5 or equivalent qualification, with a private tutor and was due to sit an examination through a local university. The constituent was informed that the SQA would not accept feedback from the private tutor, despite having sat a prelim exam privately under exam conditions. Is this an accurate reflection of the SQA’s position and what further evidence can be provided in cases like these to ensure that a person’s ability is reflected under the proposed alternative certification model?

**Answer**

The SQA will be providing further guidance as to how the certification model will work in situations with regards to those pupils taking solely private instruction.

3.3 Where a child is ill with suspected coronavirus, Government advice is currently for the household to isolate with no need to call 111 or seek other medical support unless symptoms worsen. What evidence can be provided to show that a child has been unwell if required?

**Answer**

All exams and completion of coursework has been cancelled so if a child is ill, it will have no impact on their calculated grades.

ROSS GREER MSP

**Questions on Coursework & Evidencing**

The SQA have stated that Higher & Advanced Higher coursework submissions are not required but that completed coursework can be used as part of the suite of evidence which will determine grades. To clarify, does this mean that the SQA will not uplift any coursework from schools post Friday 20th March?

If this is not the case and uplift of any available evidence is planned, will deadlines remain the same?

If the regular uplift is not going ahead, will completed coursework be collected by the SQA and marked at a later date, for example to assess against predicted grades submitted by teachers/lecturers or as part of an appeals process?
If coursework is not to be uplifted and instead used as evidence of teacher judgement in the issuing of predicted grades, should coursework completed after Friday 20th March be considered by teachers (presuming it can be safely submitted, i.e. online)?

If coursework completed after Friday 20th March is admissible evidence, how will equity be achieved in the issuing of grades between those who are able to complete further coursework from home and those who are not, for reasons of illness, self-isolation, living situation, lack of resources such as an internet connection etc? How will this latter group not be disadvantaged?

Many pupils were sent home with coursework, portfolios etc. on Friday 20th March. If these are to be used as evidence, has clear communication gone directly to pupils, as well as to staff, to ensure that they do not dispose of evidence which they may now believe is of no further use?

If coursework completed after Friday 20th is not admissible evidence, how will this be verified in the situations where students took the coursework home that week and may now, with the best of intentions, continue to work on it ahead of submission?

What is the advice on college students completing assessments via distance learning, given it is not completed under the proscribed supervised conditions?

Closed book assessments cannot be done but even open book is supposed to be supervised, which is clearly not possible. [also asked by Jamie Halcro-Johnston]

When will the SQA clarify exactly what evidence is required?

Many college courses are modular and some simply do not produce evidence throughout the year. With modules uncompleted and a lack of evidence, on what basis are lecturers to issue estimated grades?

Coursework completed with the assistance of a tutor being used as evidence in a far more consequental manner than normal will give students in this privileged position a disproportionate advantage. How can this be taken into account when in many cases teachers are not even aware that their student has a tutor?

Answer

The Chief Examining Officer has confirmed that schools and colleges are not required to submit learner coursework for marking for Higher and Advanced Higher courses. Where coursework has been completed, this can be used as part of the suite of evidence for teachers and lecturers to draw on as they consider estimated grades.

For National 5 coursework that has been submitted, this will be retained and could play a role in an appeals process should it prove necessary.

The SQA has stated that further detailed guidance on the working of the certification model will be issued by 20 April.

Questions on Evidencing & Teacher/Lecturer Judgement

What verification process will be in place for the teacher/lecturer issuing of predicted grades?
Is the fire in Peebles going to be taken into account when their grades are decided as this has undoubtedly affected their ability to achieve grades? Coursework was lost in fire.

College students often do not attend every class due to personal reasons, which is accepted. Some courses do not sit prelims. Focus is more on final exam. How are lecturers to evidence professional judgement with less coursework?

When will teachers/lecturers be expected to submit predicted grades to the SQA?

What allowances will be made if teachers/lecturers are unable to access evidence ie because schools continue to be closed, students took portfolios home and are unable to return them etc?

What measures will be put in place to protect teachers, whose professional judgement will this year have a disproportionate impact on their pupils?

How will the weight being placed on a teacher’s professional judgement take into account situations in which individual teachers are not aware of a pupils ‘circumstances? What role will guidance/pastoral teachers play? As an example, a pupil who did poorly in his prelims was diagnosed days before schools closed with anxiety and depression. Only their guidance teacher is aware of their diagnosis at present.

**Answer**

The SQA is currently developing an certification model to award qualifications and ensure that young people are not disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

The Chief Examiner set out on 2 April that teachers will be required to submit their judgements of pupils estimated grades and the ranking of pupils in each estimated grade. The SQA has stated that further detailed guidance on the working of the certification model will be issued by 20 April.

The Chief Examiner has been clear that every effort is being made to ensure that, with the support of the system, awards can be made by 4 August.

**Questions on Prelims**

How will prelim exams be used as part of the body of evidence on which grades are based?

How will the use of prelim exams take into account the significant differences in the time at which they are sat, sometimes of up to four months?

Will prelim exam papers be quality-assured to ensure that no pupil is disadvantaged for having taken a poor-quality prelim?

For National 5 candidates, the DFM removed the need for unit assessments for those who would be sitting the final exam, so there is very little verifiable evidence available, particularly in subjects such as Maths. What will be considered evidence in these situations?
**Answer**

The SQA is currently developing a certification model to award qualifications and ensure that young people are not disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

The Chief Examiner set out on 2 April that teachers will be required to submit their judgements of pupils’ estimated grades and the ranking of pupils in each estimated grade. The SQA has stated that further detailed guidance on the working of the certification model will be issued by 20 April.

The Chief Examiner has been clear that every effort is being made to ensure that, with the support of the system, awards can be made by 4 August.

**Questions on Exams**

Will an exam be offered at a later date for those not happy with result, (as is the case in England)?

Some of our (university) students are concerned about being known as the "COVID graduates", with employers knowing that they didn't have to sit the same exams as in other years. What can be done to ensure that this year's students can demonstrate to potential employers that their qualifications carry the same rigour as those from other years. Universities have the autonomy and skills to manage this, but do colleges have the flexibility to create and implement alternative assessments at short notice?

**Answer**

There are no plans to hold any exams before the 2021 exam diet.

**Questions on Appeals**

What appeals process will be available to students who are not awarded the grade they feel they deserve? (also asked by Jamie Halcro-Johnston and Beatrice Wishart)

Will any appeals process include a financial cost, similar to the current charge for re-marking exam papers?

**Answer**

Where pupils are not satisfied with their estimated grades, the Chief Examiner has set out that the Post Results Service will be in operation and there will be no associated charge for accessing it. Further details will be provided in due course.

**Miscellaneous Questions**

With exams cancelled, what measures are in place to ensure that pupils attain the learning outcomes of their courses, even if they are not assessed in the normal way?

Have the SQA consulted learners in the process of making these arrangements thus far and what plans are there to consult learners before confirming final arrangements?
Answer
The SQA has had discussions with a range of stakeholders during the development of the certification model to award qualifications and ensure that young people are not disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

The Chief Examiner set out on 2 April that teachers will be required to submit their judgements of pupils’ estimated grades, and the ranking of pupils in each estimated grade. SQA has stated that further detailed guidance on the working of the certification model will be issued by 20 April.

The Chief Examiner has been clear that every effort is being made to ensure that, with the support of the system, awards can be made by 4 August.
24 April 2020

Dear Clare

COVID 19

Further to my letter of 14 April, I now attach the responses to the remaining questions from the Committee about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Scottish education. I hope this, along with the guidance published on 20 April to help support continuity in children and young people’s learning in Term 4, will provide you with the information you require about the Scottish Government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Yours Sincerely

JOHN SWINNEY
Annexe

Schools

What planning is taking place in relation to the next academic year, should schools remain closed or if additional time is required to mitigate the school closures?

As I mentioned in my letter of 14 April, we are planning the next phase of the pandemic response and the potential recovery phase. In order to assist that planning, and to ensure continued partnership working to address all the issues, the Scottish Government is convening a Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (ERG) to drive forward a series of workstreams that will address the issues that are impacting on education in Scotland as a result of the pandemic. Its immediate focus will be to generate system-wide input into decisions on re-opening of schools and early learning centres, with a focus on how this happens rather than when.

The Group will include representation at a strategic level from our partners in Local Government along with stakeholders across the education system. In the immediate term the ERG will generate system-wide input into decisions relating to re-opening; over the longer term the ERG will look beyond the immediate impact to consider, from a strategic and policy perspective, how the Government can best support the education and ELC sectors moving forward. The first meeting of the ERG will be held on Friday 24 April.

Colleges, universities and modern apprenticeships

How is the Scottish Government supporting universities and colleges to continue teaching and, where necessary, research activities?

The Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, Mr Lochhead, is leading our response on Covid-19 in relation to communities, colleges, universities, their staff and students. He is chairing a high level leadership group to oversee the tertiary sector’s response to Covid-19. The group includes Scottish Government, its agencies, sector representatives from community learning, colleges and universities, and unions, including the National Union of Students Scotland. The group’s first virtual meeting was on 2 April and it will continue to meet regularly to consider issues, agree actions and communicate our response to Covid-19.

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has advised the sectors that its key priorities are to maintain stability and continuity, and to work with universities and colleges on financial health. As part of this, the SFC is continuing with scheduled payments to universities and colleges for the remainder of this academic year and confirmed funding allocations for the 2020-21 academic year on Monday 6th April.

The SFC is also discussing with the sectors how it can work flexibly during this time, in order that universities and colleges can channel their efforts into their key activities of teaching, learning, and research. For example, the SFC has undertaken to significantly scale back on routine engagements and will not take forward any new consultations or significant changes at this time.
The SFC will also keep its returns and reporting requirements to an absolute minimum, while ensuring good governance standards are preserved and any legal reporting obligations are met. Furthermore, the SFC is liaising with UK research funding bodies to ensure that its policies are aligned and take account of the UK funding landscape.

The SFC is also encouraging those agencies it funds, such as College Development Network and Education Scotland, to refocus their time and resource to supporting the sector requirements around online learning.

Colleges and universities have stopped all face-to-face teaching and are providing online teaching and assessment where appropriate. We are working with both sectors and with SQA to support learner continuity and to support those who are moving into further or higher education from school this year. We understand that many young people who have applied to college or university this year may be feeling anxious about the announcement that the exam diet in 2020 cannot go ahead. We wish to reassure them that they will receive their results in good time for universities and colleges to assess their qualifications in the normal way. SQA are doing their utmost, with the support of the education system, to ensure that the hard work of pupils is rightly and fairly recognised and allows them to proceed to further learning or work.

We also wish to extend the same reassurance for those undertaking courses in colleges who are applying for university this year. SQA is working closely in partnership with Colleges Scotland, to agree a joint approach to the certification of other qualifications, including Higher National qualifications, to ensure that achievements are recognised in as fair a way as possible. UCAS has also extended its May undergraduate deadlines - both for institutions to make offers and for students to make their decisions.

A large proportion of research activity at Scotland’s universities has been disrupted by the Covid-19 isolation measures. This naturally includes almost all research with a practical element. Intelligence on the impact of this is being gathered. Where possible, university and innovation centre resources and expertise are being made available to support NHS-led testing and research on Covid-19.

Our Interface programme is now acting as a conduit for SG and NHS asks related to Covid-19 from universities, colleges and innovation centres. Research funders are currently reviewing their funding arrangements and, in support of institutional stability, the four devolved HEI research funding bodies in the UK have jointly suspended the current Research Excellence Framework exercise (REF21) until further notice.

You have not specifically mentioned support for students in your letter, however, I feel it is important to highlight the measures the Scottish Government are putting in place to support students facing financial hardship, and we will provide you with a separate update on this.
Is the Scottish Government or Scottish Funding Council undertaking modelling work on the economic impact on colleges and universities of the pandemic?

Work around the financial impact of Covid-19 is being progressed as a priority and at pace both within the Scottish Government, SFC and across the university and college sectors. We continue to work closely with our institutions, the SFC and other stakeholders through our Further and Higher Education Covid-19 Ministerial Leadership Group to build as full an understanding of the position as possible.

What work is Skills Development Scotland undertaking to assess the impact of the coronavirus on apprenticeship schemes?

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is working with SQA and other awarding bodies to update guidance for individuals and learning providers to ensure that disruption is minimised and that wherever possible, apprentices and learners are not negatively impacted in the long term. Apprentices are being supported to complete their learning via alternative means (for example, online/digitally) and, where that’s not possible, apprentices will be able to resume their learning when they return back to the workplace.

Measures have been put in place to support training providers who are unable to access employer premises due to Covid-19. This is to ensure that training providers can continue to register starts and draw down funding, which was a concern for some of the training provider network. It is hoped this will also provide support and reassurance to providers about continuity of business in the immediate future. From April 2020 (the start of the new contract year), SDS is working with Scottish Government to scope the necessary additional support to maintain the apprenticeship training infrastructure.

As part of the action taken, SDS has provided new guidance in relation to redundancy and furlough. As Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships have employed status, it is the employer who pays their wages. If an apprentice has been made redundant, they would need to register for Universal Credit. If they were being furloughed, businesses can put workers on temporary leave and the UK Government will pay them cash grants of 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500, providing they keep the worker employed. They will receive the grant from HMRC, and all UK organisations can self-certify that it has furloughed employees. The Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme will cover the cost of wages backdated to 1 March 2020.

Where an apprentice is made redundant, once they have notified their training provider, SDS will provide continuing support as part of their Partnership for Continuing Employment (PACE) programme. Further information on SDS’s response can be found at: https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/coronavirus- covid-19/
Questions from Individual Committee Members

JAMIE HALCRO JOHNSTON MSP

Distance learning
1.1 Existing resources like Glow allow teachers to engage in distance learning with their pupils. I have received reports that some of these resources are experiencing pressures, particularly during peak times. Will the Cabinet Secretary look into the availability and capacity of these resources on a national level and are any new resources planned?

Answer
There is currently unprecedented global demand for access to online services, not just to support distance learning but for business, communications, entertainment and social media. Education Scotland has worked very closely with all of the Glow suppliers to ensure additional capacity was made available. To date, the services have held up well, with expected pinch points at particular points during the day but no major outages. It is worth noting that, as Glow is a cloud based service, access is dependent on local connectivity. As set out in my letter of 14 April, a range of work is being undertaken to address issues related to digital exclusion. Education Scotland is also in weekly contact with the Glow Key Contacts in each local authority so they can raise any issues directly with the Glow team.

Adding new services at this time is a challenge but we will continue to engage closely with local authorities and users to ensure that Glow is meeting the needs of the system during this challenging period.

1.2 Given that some teachers may be relatively unfamiliar with existing distance learning systems, is there any availability of training or support resources for them? Can they, for example, access a telephone helpline to assist.

Answer
Education Scotland is delivering webinars for practitioners as part of the immediate support it has provided. The webinars focus on how to use the tools in Glow to support remote working and learning. The first two sessions were delivered on the 26 and 27 March with 250 participants taking part. Over 800 practitioners registered for webinars in the first week for over 2,200 individual sessions.

Education Scotland will continue to work with our local authority contacts to help identify priorities for building practitioners’ skills and confidence in leading, preparing for, and providing distance/remote learning.

1.3 Will any direction be given from central government on measures that should be undertaken to promote distance learning, particularly from pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds? There may, for example, be pupils who do not have access to an internet connection at home and may find using online resources difficult.
Answer
Education Scotland is in constant communication with local authority staff at different levels and functions within the local authority structure. Local authorities, working with all their staff including head teachers and children’s services, have identified the risks and strategies to reach pupils who do not have access to the internet at home. For example, issuing devices to the most disadvantaged families, assigning school work through paper based packs and providing connectivity guides showing how to connect to learning through mobile phones or games consoles. Local authorities are best placed to know what those children and their families need and how to provide it. Education Scotland’s regular liaison with Directors of Education is helping to identify if and how it can support local authorities, headteachers and their staff in this aspect of their work.

4. Further education colleges
4.1 What discussions has the Scottish Government had with further education colleges about qualifications and distance learning at this stage, and has their approach been satisfactory?

Answer
SQA is working closely in partnership with Colleges Scotland, to agree a joint approach to the certification of qualifications to ensure that achievements are recognised in as fair a way as possible. Both colleges and universities have stopped all face-to-face teaching and are providing online teaching and assessment where appropriate. We are working with both sectors and with SQA to support learner continuity and to support those who are moving into higher or further education from school this year.

The challenges relating to the continuity of learning varies across Further and Higher Education within colleges. Colleges Scotland and the College Development Network are working to ensure consistent approach is available across Scotland. At the same time the Community Learning & Development sector is being asked to support colleges in supporting those learners most at risk of continuing.

ROSS GREER MSP

Coursework & Evidencing
Question
What is the advice on college students completing assessments via distance learning, given it is not completed under the proscribed supervised conditions? Closed book assessments cannot be done but even open book is supposed to be supervised, which is clearly not possible. [also asked by Jamie Halcro-Johnston]

Answer
SQA is continuing to work closely in partnership with Colleges Scotland, and with representatives within colleges to create guidance for college delivery and quality assurance for Higher National Certificates (HNC), Higher National Diplomas (HND), National Certificates (NCs) and National Progression Awards (NPAs) qualifications, as well as National Qualification (NQ) units, which may be part of college certificated courses.
SQA and Colleges Scotland have aligned the approach for all these courses and units in line with earlier commitments made on Higher National (HN) qualifications. This means that college staff can take an holistic approach, where necessary, in determining grades. This will enable colleges to use their professional judgement to assess achievement evidence, including knowledge of learners’ progress and achievements to date.

On 3 April, SQA, in collaboration with Colleges Scotland and college colleagues, provided guidance materials to all colleges in Scotland, which provided them with information on the new approach for this session.

We appreciate that learners may have questions about these arrangements, and colleges are collaborating on the production of consistent FAQs to answer these.

**Question**
Many college courses are modular and some simply do not produce evidence throughout the year. With modules uncompleted and a lack of evidence, on what basis are lecturers to issue estimated grades?

**Answer**
As highlighted above, holistic assessment is now in place. Once holistic assessment decisions have been finalised, learner results for the planned units contained within a group award will be submitted to SQA through normal resulting channels. Certification will be undertaken by SQA in line with normal arrangements. Any changes to these will be communicated to colleges.

It is essential that accurate and complete data is entered for certification to ensure that learners are awarded the certificates they deserve, enabling them to take their next steps into further or higher education, employment or apprenticeships.

SQA is currently reviewing the subject areas where alternative approaches to assessment may not be suitable, for example, where there are matters of health and safety to be considered. Further guidance on this is in development.

SQA and Colleges Scotland will operate a reduced external verification model for HNs, NCs and NPAs, that will enable a reasonable level of quality assurance to be undertaken remotely, to support the safe and secure delivery of qualifications, whilst recognising the current challenges faced.

**Evidencing & Teacher/Lecturer Judgement**

**Question**
College students often do not attend every class due to personal reasons, which is accepted. Some courses do not sit prelims. Focus is more on final exam. How are lecturers to evidence professional judgement with less coursework?

**Answer**
SQA is working closely in partnership with Colleges Scotland in these unprecedented times. We are working together to recognise learner achievement in as fair a way as possible, including where students have been unable to complete coursework or sit prelims during the academic year. The details of how this will work
in practice are under consideration and we will provide an update as soon as is practicable.

Exams

**Question**
Some of our (university) students are concerned about being known as the "COVID graduates", with employers knowing that they didn't have to sit the same exams as other years. What can be done to ensure that this year’s students can demonstrate to potential employers that their qualifications carry the same rigour as those from other years. Universities have the autonomy and skills to manage this, but do colleges have the flexibility to create and implement alternative assessments at short notice?

**Answer**
We appreciate this is a difficult and uncertain situation for students. That is why we are absolutely committed to working together, across the entire education and skills system, to ensure that all learners hard work and achievements are recognised as they should be, and that nobody is unfairly impacted as a result of the Covid-19 virus.

Admissions

**Question**
Will university/college grade boundaries be affected by pupils not actually sitting exams?

**Answer**
In relation to the university and college sectors, the format of assessment will change in many cases so there will be no ‘in person’ exams during the current restrictions but, there will still be assessment. The precise form of the assessment will vary depending on the nature of the programme in question and the learning outcomes being assessed. In some specific cases (e.g. practice-based work if the learning outcome related to a skill or other activity that cannot readily be moved to an online format) elements of assessment may need to be delayed until the current lockdown has passed.

**Question**
What discussions have the SQA and Scottish Government had with Universities/Colleges Scotland regarding this?

**Answer**
SQA and the Scottish Government are working closely with Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland on these issues.

**Question**
Will Access courses be going ahead and if so, when will the application process open?

**Answer**
All universities have moved their teaching and learning to online platforms, where possible. At this stage, SFC has not been made aware of any access course not
going ahead. In the majority of cases, access courses are applied to through the UCAS system, which has closed for applications for entry in academic year 2020/21.

BEATRICE WISHART MSP

Question
Given that isolation from the outside world is a tactic many domestic abuse perpetrators deploy, and that Adverse Childhood Experiences can be lifelong, how can we protect children that are living in a domestic abuse household during this lock-down? What action can be taken to ensure that children in those households receive educational support?

Answer
The Scottish Government is taking a broad approach to addressing the wide range of adversities which can impact on children’s healthy development.

The Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 reflects the fact that children are harmed by domestic abuse, and it is becoming clear that measures taken to reduce the spread of Covid-19, including social distancing and restrictions on free movement, can place victims of domestic abuse in an increasingly vulnerable position. The safety of these victims is of paramount importance, and as a government we have been taking steps to ensure that everyone is aware of the support still available to them.

Police Scotland’s response to domestic abuse remains unchanged, with a firm commitment to tackling domestic abuse, and using the full extent of their powers to ensure perpetrators face the consequences of their behaviour. Officers will continue to respond to reports and endeavour to prevent harm by identifying people who may be at risk.

The rights of children do not alter during this pandemic, and nor do professional responsibilities in relation to child protection. It is expected that all those caring for children will act sensibly, safely, and in line with Scottish Government and UK Government guidance. We know that leaders responsible for the protection of children locally have already made, and continue to make, complex decisions about managing risk within the context of their evolving responses. Where a court order for parental contact is in place, the Lord President has issued guidance on compliance with court orders for contact during the Coronavirus crisis: https://www.scotcourts.gov.uk/coming-to-court/attending-a-court/coronavirus. The Scottish Government has also included information on the ParentClub website: https://www.parentclub.scot/articles/coronavirus-and-your-family. If face to face contact is not appropriate or possible then the child should be able to communicate with their parents by other means such as Skype, WhatsApp, Facetime, or by telephone.

We have re-launched the Domestic Abuse campaign, which will run until 17th May, with the key message that during this pandemic victims of domestic abuse are not alone, and help is available over the phone, through webchat, or by email. The campaign also signposts to key support services, and provides guidance on staying safe in a domestic abuse situation under current ‘stay at home’ advice.
Our overall aim is that, despite the Covid-19 crisis, victims feel no change to the level of support or help that is available to them. To help victim support organisations continue to deliver fully functioning key support services, we have enhanced individual grants to cover Covid-related costs. This includes over £1.5m allocated to Scottish Women’s Aid and Rape Crisis Scotland. We also provide funding of £200,000 to ASSIST, for provision of advocacy and support services to children in the areas it operates, albeit with some changes to service delivery as a result of reductions in court service during the Covid-19 crisis.

In terms of educational support, those who work directly with children and young people are best placed to identify children and young people who are potentially at risk and will require access to local education hubs as a result of ELC and school closures.

Local authorities will know the children and families within their areas who fall into that category and will be able to identify them to enable them to engage in learning, and have access to support in order to secure their wellbeing. Further information can be found here: https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-guide-schools-early-learning-closures/

**Question**
Currently SAAS have stated that payments will continue until May. If students need to return to university to complete units later in the summer, will SAAS be able to extend financial support?

**Answer**
Scheduled payments will continue up to the end of term for each course, which will be June and July in some cases. We are currently exploring further options on a number of enhanced support measures for students impacted by COVID-19.

**Question**
Will final year nursing students who are called up to work be required to complete further summative course work that will form part of their degree grade during this time? What guarantee can be given that their course outcomes will not be detrimentally impacted by working for the NHS during this crisis?

**Answer**
The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) has introduced emergency standards for all nursing and midwifery programmes in the UK. These will allow students in the final six months of their pre-registration undergraduate, or postgraduate, nursing or midwifery programmes to complete their final 6 months of programmes in clinical placements, while ensuring all learning outcomes are met.

Final year nursing students who come forward to support the NHS at this time of need will continue to be supported by their university, which will offer ways of maintaining contact when they are in clinical practice.
Students who choose to be deployed to help the health service will be supported by their university to achieve their course requirements across the remaining period of their studies, including academic work, ensuring that all learning outcomes are met.

Students will be able to complete their programmes on time, and will be able to register in the normal way to become full members of the registered nurse workforce.

Students who choose to be deployed will be paid, and the bursary and associated allowances will also continue to be paid for all students regardless of whether a student is deployed during this period.

**Question**
What is the situation for (a) current probationers (including those on the flexible route) (b) supply teachers (c) supply teachers with a contracted agreement with schools (d) teachers on rolling one year contracts and those currently waiting to hear about jobs starting in August who are neither permanent with a school or council.

**Answer (a) Current Probationers**
Probationer teachers who are currently on the Teacher Induction Scheme (TIS) and Flexible Route (FR) for Induction will continue to be employed and paid for the duration of their fixed term contract.

The General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTCS) published revised guidance on the 17 March illustrating the reduced term to achieve full registration. Currently there is a requirement for probationers to complete a minimum number of days on TIS or Flexible Route. This is 190 days and 270 days respectively. The GTCS current position is that they will accept 140 satisfactorily completed days for TIS probationers and 200 satisfactorily completed days for FR probationers.

It may be necessary to review these should circumstances change significantly in the coming weeks and months. The GTCS has also advised that any probationers who find themselves unable to attend school for a period of time can consider reviewing their progress against the Standard for Full Registration and undertaking learning activities to address any gaps identified.

**Answer (b) & (c) Supply teachers**
On Thursday 26th March, the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT) issued SNCT Circular 20-75. That circular provided assurances for those temporary supply teachers already in contract as at 20 March 2020.

**Answer (d) Short term supply**
Discussions are currently underway with COSLA looking at the issue of job retention for the more casual local government workforce, including supply teachers. The SNCT is giving consideration to this specifically for supply teachers to ensure that those supply teachers not in contract as at 20th March will also have the protection of no detriment. This is being discussed as a matter of urgency with all parties of the SNCT and we expect to have arrangements in place very soon. The Scottish Government is playing its full part in those discussions.
QUESTIONS FROM UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND – SUBMITTED BY A NUMBER OF MEMBERS

Question
In light of the potentially very serious impact of COVID-19 on universities’ sustainability, does the Scottish Government recognise the scale of financial risk facing universities, across all of their activities; and can the Scottish Government reassure Scotland’s 19 universities that it will commit the resources to support institutions’ financial sustainability, reduce permanent damage and lay the foundations for the sector to contribute as strongly as possible to Scotland’s recovery and success?

Answer
We are working to ensure our institutions can continue to support their students and retain their staff. We continue to work with the SFC to build as full an understanding as possible of the scale of the risk facing the further and higher education sectors. SFC is engaged in detailed work to quantify the scale and nature of the risk and is sharing the outputs of this work with my officials to help shape the Scottish Government response.

Question
Can the Scottish Government give an assurance that whatever decision is taken about the fee status of EU undergraduate students due to start at Scottish universities in 2021/22, that the sum of funding that would have gone to universities to support this type of provision will not be removed from higher education in AY 2021/22 given the highly destabilising combination of financial factors that universities are facing across every aspect of their business as a result of COVID-19?

Answer
The Scottish Government is working to consider the funding position for future support to EU students beyond 2020/21. We continue to consider carefully all implications and are mindful of the challenging timescales which institutions are facing in preparing for the recruitment of 2021/22 entrants.

We acknowledge the need to be cognisant of the potential for interplay between the implications of any funding decision and the pressures placed on Scotland’s universities as a result of Covid-19. Work continues to fully understand the scope and scale of the latter.

Question
Universities are not closed and are providing “essential” services to many thousands of students still in accommodation, key research and testing and other COVID-19 related work. The discretion for local councils to interpret the Scottish Government’s guidance on three categories of key workers creates the possibility of inconsistency across Scotland and increased bureaucracy as universities deliver services across multiple Councils. Can there be a move to greater consistency?
Answer
Ministers held a number of meetings with universities and colleges during March. At these meetings, the issue of the core services which institutions need to maintain was discussed. SFC has also undertaken survey activity to further define the staff still required to be physically present on campuses to provide essential services. These are staff who are:

- Engaged in research and clinical activity that is contributing to the work to combat the COVID-19 outbreak.
- Ensuring the continuity of long-term research projects and experiments that cannot be safely paused.
- Supporting students in halls of residence.
- Working in on-campus nurseries to support key staff.
- Ensuring the security and health of live animals housed on campuses.
- Delivering essential IT, maintenance, security and cleaning services.

Furthermore, universities have contacted COSLA directly to highlight in particular the contribution of university staff to the operation of the NHS and to researching public health and viral testing / vaccines. COSLA has been asked to highlight this to its members across the country.