

Response to Committee

Dear Cabinet Secretary,

Assessment Process 2021-22

As you will be aware the Committee considered the operation of the 2021 Alternative Certification Model (ACM) earlier this year. This involved taking evidence from children and young people and key educational stakeholders, including the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The Committee recognises that the 2021 ACM was developed and delivered in unprecedented and changing circumstances in the context of a global pandemic. As part of that process a clear message from the evidence we considered was that scenario planning is critically important and requires to be undertaken early and then clearly communicated.

The Committee recognises that the Scottish Government has been undertaking scenario-planning particularly in the event that additional or significant disruption to schooling takes place in 2022. In the light of the spread of the Omicron variant in recent weeks, the Committee requests an update on the Scottish Government's current scenario planning for the 2022 exams diet.

The Committee would welcome an update by Wednesday 5 January 2022.

Dear Convener

Thank you for your letter dated 22 December 2021. Apologies that I was unable to reply by 5 January as requested.

As you indicate, the approach to 2022 exams has been co-ordinated by SQA through the National Qualifications 22 Group and designed to flex in response to further disruption to learning caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

I confirmed on 18 August 2021 that exams would take place in 2022 if it is safe to do so. On the same day, SQA confirmed the approach to the 2022 exam diet and the contingency arrangements built into that model should there be further disruption; this approach has not changed in light of the spread of the omicron variant. I am confident that those contingency arrangements are still sound despite the emergence of the omicron variant.

SQA announced modifications to the assessment requirements for each National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course on 23 June 2021. The modifications help reduce the volume of assessment and ease teacher, lecturer and learner workload, while maintaining the credibility of these qualifications. For most National 5 to Advanced Higher courses, these are the same modifications that were put in place for 2020-21.

If there is further significant disruption to learning and teaching this session, appropriate additional support measures for learners will be put in place to ensure that exams can still go ahead. For some courses this could include, for example, advance notice of some topics which will feature in exams. SQA are actively

monitoring the situation in relation to the omicron variant and the resulting disruption to learning.

If changes to public health advice mean that large gatherings of people are no longer permitted in April to June, and exams are cancelled, SQA will ask teachers and lecturers to use their professional judgement of assessment evidence to determine learners' grades.

Schools, colleges and training providers ~~have would~~ not been required to carry out any additional assessments, as they did in 2020-21. Instead, teachers and lecturers have been asked to determine learners' grades, based on the work that learners have already completed throughout the year ie based on normal planned in-year assessment.

To prepare for the possibility of this scenario, teachers and lecturers have been gathering examples of learners' work and keeping a record of any assessments that have and continue to take place throughout the session, for example prelims, practical performances or class tests that provide an appropriate degree of challenge, integration and application of the key knowledge and skills of each National Course.

SQA is also planning to put in place similar support services as those that were in place when exams were last held, for example where exceptional circumstances mean learners cannot sit exams or where they do not perform to the standard expected. More detail on this and a further update on planning for the qualifications will be provided in January.

I hope that is helpful.

SAS

Response to MSP addressing q to FM

Martin Whitfield (South Scotland) (Lab):

The First Minister has talked about decisions being reached by 12 January and has said that any change to the isolation period for index cases might be announced as early as 5 January. I know that she will not have underestimated the effect of the new variant on pupils returning to school, particularly on those returning for preliminary exams in January.

Will the First Minister say what discussion there has been about the 2021-22 exam diet? What new advice have schools been given about the collection of exam evidence from pupils who have to isolate?

The First Minister:

There is at present no change to the arrangements that were set out by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills not long before the Christmas recess—I cannot recall exactly when she set them out. The expectation is that exams will go ahead in this academic year. Contingency arrangements are in place and there are

considerations that would inform that. Anyone can look at the detail of that but I am happy to ask the education secretary to write to the member with a reminder of and an update on those plans.

Dear Mr Whitfield

I am providing further information about the position of 2021-22 exams in light of the omicron variant, and specifically the collection of exam evidence, further to a question you posed to First Minister on 29 December.

I provided an update to Parliament on 22 December (S6O-00574) and the position remains the same (text is provided at Annex A) although is of course kept under review.

The approach to 2022 exams has been co-ordinated by SQA through the National Qualifications 22 Group and designed to flex in response to further disruption to learning caused by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

I confirmed on 18 August 2021 that exams would take place in 2022 if it is safe to do so. On the same day, SQA confirmed the approach to the 2022 exam diet and the contingency arrangements built into that model should there be further disruption; this approach has not changed in light of the spread of the omicron variant. I am confident that those contingencies arrangements are still sound despite the emergence of the omicron variant.

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If there is further significant disruption to learning and teaching this session, appropriate additional support measures for learners will be put in place to ensure that exams can still go ahead. For some courses this could include, for example, advance notice of some topics which will feature in exams. SQA are actively monitoring the situation in relation to the omicron variant and the resulting disruption to learning.

If changes to public health advice mean that large gatherings of people are no longer permitted in April to June, and exams are cancelled, SQA will ask teachers and lecturers to use their professional judgement of assessment evidence to determine learners' grades.

Schools, colleges and training providers ~~have would~~ not ~~been~~ required to carry out any additional assessments, as they did in 2020-21. Instead, teachers and lecturers have been asked to determine learners' grades, based on the work that learners have already completed throughout the year [i.e. based on normal planned in-year assessment](#).

To prepare for the [possibility of this](#) scenario, teachers and lecturers have been gathering examples of learners' work and keeping a record of any assessments that have and continue to take place throughout the session, for example prelims, practical performances or class tests that provide an appropriate degree of challenge, integration and application of the key knowledge and skills of each National Course.

You asked specifically about the impact on preliminary exams. For schools that intend to use prelims as one of the opportunities for naturally occurring assessment, to support the wider evidence base of a learner's demonstrated attainment in case required this year, it is important to be clear that prelims are not a mandatory part of the SQA qualifications process. However, given the opportunity that prelims provide to demonstrate evidence of a learner's attainment, schools would be encouraged to exercise flexibility in timing to help overcome any issues caused by significant disruption to learning.

I hope that is helpful.

Annex A: Response to S6O-00574 on 22 December 2021

- **School Examinations 2022**
1. Gillian Martin (Aberdeenshire East) (SNP)

To ask the Scottish Government what plans are being put in place for the 2022 school examinations. (S6O-00574)

The Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills (Shirley-Anne Somerville)
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As we confirmed in August, we are planning that exams will take place in 2022. Significant modifications have already been made to course assessments—both exams and coursework—to take into account disruption to learning. Contingency plans are in place, as the Scottish Qualifications Authority outlined in August and described in more detail in September, to offset any further significant national disruption that arises from Covid. That approach provides the flexibility to adapt to any increased levels of disruption to learning at a national level.