

Teacher strikes – potential impact on SQA exams

Wednesday 1 March 2023

Further to my previous update, the ongoing industrial dispute between Scottish Government, COSLA and teacher unions is continuing to create a difficult and concerning situation for us – particularly around release of teachers so they can carry out their appointee duties such as visiting assessment and marking of coursework and exams.

We are in regular discussion with the Scottish Government and senior colleagues attended a meeting with them and the five targeted local authorities on Tuesday 28 February. At the meeting we discussed what steps everyone involved is taking to minimise disruption for learners preparing for their exams. This included the actions being taken by Local Authorities to mitigate impacts on learning and teaching and the national eLearning offer from Education Scotland.

We also have an internal cross-organisational working group, which is meeting daily to closely monitor the impact to main diet activity – particularly visiting assessment and marking coursework. We have written to all centres and their local authority emphasising the need for partnership working and in particular for teacher release to support the exam diet.

The messages highlight our commitment to working with the whole education community in the best interests of learners as well as the package of support already in place.

Awarding National Qualifications depends on the whole education community working together and playing their part in delivering for learners. We need teachers to carry out visiting assessment, mark coursework and exams.

We already have a package of support in place this year designed to help learners experiencing disruption to learning and teaching including modifications to course assessments and a sensitive approach to grading.

While we will have the Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service available for learners whose performance is affected by personal circumstances beyond their control, it is important to note that this service is not appropriate for addressing widespread disruption to learning and teaching.

The Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration service is designed to support individual learners who have been unable to attend an exam or learners whose performance on an exam may have been affected by personal circumstances or an unplanned incident on the day of the exam and should only be used for individual learners.

We are committed to doing everything we can to mitigate the impact of any industrial action on assessment and exams, as part of the contingency planning being led by the Scottish Government.

While we are limited in what additional steps we can take, we have agreed some special arrangements **with 16 schools that are impacted by the industrial action targeted at specific parliamentary constituencies, within five Local Authorities**. This includes some extensions to coursework deadlines in three subject areas.

All other requests for coursework extensions will be considered on a case-by-case basis but will not be approved due to industrial action, as we have a limited capacity to deal with coursework extensions.

We are continuing to recruit teachers into appointee roles and have asked schools and local authorities to continue their support in releasing teachers wishing to carry out their SQA duties.

We have a national contingency arrangement in place with the Scottish Government and this has been invoked. The first meeting of that stakeholder group takes place this Friday, 3 March 2023 and will be chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. We will keep you updated as the situation progresses.