

**PARTNER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP**

Minutes of the meeting of the Partners Communication Group, held at 3.45pm on Tuesday 16 January 2024 by Microsoft Teams.

**SQA**

John Booth (JB)  
[redacted name]  
[redacted name]  
[redacted name]  
Richard Pidgeon  
Donna Stewart  
[redacted name]  
[redacted name]  
[redacted name]

**Partners**

Ms Armour, SQA Coordinator  
Laura Burnett, SDS  
Alison Herbert, SCIS  
Graham Hutton, SLS  
Sara Lightbody, Scottish Government  
Rebecca MacDonald, Scottish Government  
Kevin MacNaughton, Education Scotland  
Ms McMillan, SQA Coordinator  
Georgia Marks, UCAS  
Stewart Nicolson, ADES

**1/1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

John Booth (JB), Director of Communications, welcomed everyone to the Partner Communications Group, including those new to the group. JB acknowledged that Alison Herbert would be attending on behalf of Lorraine Davidson, SCIS.

JB also welcomed [redacted name], SQA and informed the group that she would be providing the administrative support.

Apologies were received from Mr Chibueze, Ms Dickens, Ms Johnston, Ms MacDonald, Ms Robinson, Ms Sinclair, Ms Burnett, and Mr McGlinchey.

**1/2 KEY AUDIENCE RESEARCH – SUMMARY**

JB presented on the key audience research headlines. He stated that the detailed survey had been carried out in 2023 and had resulted in over 3,000 learners, practitioners, parents and carers taking part from schools, colleges and training providers. JB stated that the survey had covered the perceptions of SQA and the knowledge / credibility of qualifications but would focus on the communications and engagement scores from school and college audiences during the discussion.

The communication and engagement scores for schools and colleges were shared. JB explained that scores were out of 10 and across the board communication scored higher than engagement. It was highlighted that the scores were low, particularly the engagement score with teachers and the timeliness of communications. It was noted that there was scope for improvements to be made in all areas.

JB explained that actions and next steps were in place. These included:

- A series of face-to-face engagements throughout Autumn 23, with more to follow, as part of *Transforming Engagement* programme
- A new educator panel, to sit alongside learner panel, and new educator and learner charters
- Research to be repeated to track scores

The group then discussed what engagement looked like and all agreed that it must be a two-way process – how you engage and listen to feedback. Successful engagement works when those whom we engage with engage back. It was agreed that SQA must provide the mechanisms to receive this feedback. It was also suggested that there was a need to understand the expectations of learners and teachers e.g. what didn't happen that they wanted to?

It was stated that now was the time for SQA to reset and rebuild the trust, building foundations to allow for a strong start for the New Qualifications Body.

The group also expressed the importance of closing the feedback and showcasing the implementation of changes due to feedback. One member of the group suggested a “you said, we did” approach.

## 1/3 **ENGAGEMENT PLAN – INITIAL ANALYSIS**

[redacted name], provided an overview of the engagement visits in autumn 2023:

- In September 2023, SQA CEO Fiona Robertson launched a programme of centre visits, supported by range of senior staff.
- 18 visits were completed across 14 local authorities and included a range of centre types. Visits were supported by the Liaison and Regional Managers for each centre.
- The programme of visits aimed to build stronger relationships with centres across Scotland, to listen to and learn from teachers and learners directly and at first hand.
- Every centre ensured there was an opportunity to speak with educators and learners. A post-visit survey was then sent to all schools involved. More than 300 responses were received from learners and educators. 80% of survey respondents found the visits ‘very helpful’ or ‘somewhat helpful’.

[redacted name] stated that the range of level of the engagement with centres was important, ensuring that all levels were covered. It was clear there was an appetite for engagement from learners, with face-to-face meetings helping to break barriers. Follow up information was gathered following the visits and SQA now had to decide how they used it.

[redacted name] confirmed that the new *Transforming Engagement* programme for 24/25 would:

- Send SQA’s senior management team into schools and colleges across the country to hear first-hand from learners, teachers and lecturers
- Significantly strengthen the existing Learner Advisory Group and Learner Panel that directly advise SQA, recruiting new members

- Create an Educator Advisory Group so that frontline educators can also offer direct advice
- Offer every learner and educator the chance to take part in surveys, focus groups and focused panels so that their views are heard and listened to
- Overhaul SQA's Advisory Council, the group of stakeholders that advise on SQA policies and services
- Support the co-creation of new Learner and Educator Charters

[redacted name] highlighted that it was key that SQA reported on what they'd done, ensuring transparency, and agreed to share future findings, including with this group.

The group discussed the barriers around communications and feedback. It was said that SQA communications are often received by senior management and filtering messages down to other staff was challenging. A suggestion was made to provide a summary of the newsletter with links to each article at the beginning to increase ease of use.

SQA also informed the group that they were looking for centres to visit.

#### 1/4 **FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES AND TIMELINE**

[redacted name] informed the group of the forthcoming activities and timelines:

- Direct messages:
  - Dual presentation guidance (soon)
  - Exceptional Circumstances & Appeals
  - Approach to grading (Feb tbc)
  - Ongoing updates from NQ24 Group
- Weekly and monthly newsletters

Members of the group welcomed sight of the planned communications but suggested that the learner booklet and approach to appeals needed to be communicated earlier to allow candidates and teachers to plan, prepare and feel reassured.

The consensus was that the sooner information can be communicated, the better.

#### 1/5 **LANGUAGE**

JB questioned whether a conversation around the use of consistent language would be useful. The group welcomed the idea.

#### 1/6 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

To be agreed.