

PARTNER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Minutes of the meeting of the Partners Communication Group, held at 3pm on Wednesday 7 February 2024 by Microsoft Teams.

SQA

John Booth (JB)
Martyn Ware (MW)
Margot McKerrell
[redacted name]
Donna Stewart
[redacted name]
[redacted name]
[redacted name]
[redacted name]

Partners

Laura Burnett, SDS
Sara Lightbody, Scottish Government
Kevin MacNaughton, Education Scotland
Georgia Marks, UCAS
Stewart Nicolson, ADES
Emma Sinclair, Scottish Government
Laura Sorley, SDS
Andy Harvey, EIS
Kimberley Bayley Tweed, NPFS

1. Welcome

John Booth (JB), Director of Communications welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the group to Martyn Ware (MW), Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards. JB explained that this meeting was being held in relation to the forthcoming announcement on the grading approach for 2024. The SQA Board had met at the end of January and approved the high level approach. This was subsequently endorsed at the NQ Strategic Group, which also emphasised the importance of getting the communications right. JB hoped that an open, honest and meaningful conversation would follow.

2. Grade Boundary Setting

Martyn Ware (MW), Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards introduced himself to the group and presented on setting grade boundaries in 2024. MW told the group that the overall aim was to deliver fairness to learners, maintain standards and protect the integrity of the SQA qualifications. MW explained the process of boundary setting and discussed the awarding meetings involved. MW explained that for graded National Courses, awarding meetings aim to evaluate how the assessment has performed. For example, looking at,

- Has the assessment functioned as intended?
- Is it easier or more difficult than last year?
- How does learner performance compare to previous years?

Grade boundary adjustments can be made to deal with specific issues and a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence is used to inform these judgements and to set appropriate grade boundaries.

MW then provided an overview of Awarding in 2022 and 2023 when a 'generous' and a 'sensitive' approach to grading had been taken respectively.

MW, then went on to discuss with the group the proposed grading approach in 2024. MW stressed the importance to the credibility, currency and standing of our national courses that SQA's approach to awarding is informed by approaches in the rest of the UK. It was noted that other nations of the UK have started a return to pre pandemic awarding and standards for 2024.

In 2024 most courses which previously had modifications to their assessment during 2021-22 and 2022-23 have now returned to full assessment. A programme of Understanding Standards has been carried out with teachers where coursework has been reintroduced. SQA propose to return to established awarding processes in 2024 using a rigorous, long standing and published approach to the setting of grade boundaries. This will take into account how assessments have functioned and an awareness of the potential impact of the removal of course modifications.

3. Communicating the Approach to Grading in 2024

[redacted name] continued the presentation showing the group a slide of the planned communications.

Tone and language to Educators:

"In 2024, we will use our well-established approach to grading with protections built in – for example, we will consider any impact caused by the fact that this year's learners will be completing coursework for the first time. This approach will provide fairness for learners and help to deliver stability across the wider education community."

Tone and language to Learners, Parents and Carers:

"SQA realises that you are/your child is completing coursework for the first time in 2024. We will consider this when determining the grade boundaries to ensure fairness for all learners."

[redacted name] told the group that there would be an opportunity to discuss the tone and wording and she would welcome feedback from the group at the end of the presentation.

[redacted name] spoke about the proposed time frame for planning and the release of communications. These included engagement meetings with partners and learners, National Qualification awarding updates to centres and media, social media posts, updates on SQA News and the website and a proposed Results Booklet to coincide with results day in August.

[redacted name] discussed some questions which the communications team had identified could be asked when reading the material. These included what is "meant by protections and well-established?", "who is the wider education community?" "why are learners completing coursework for the first time?" and "what do you mean by grade boundaries?" [redacted name] thanked the group and welcomed feedback in relation to the communications.

4. Response from the group in relation to the proposed Communications.

JB asked the group if they had any observations, questions or comments to make. Overall, the group were positive and commented that the tone appeared to be right.

In relation to the communications to learners, parents and carers, the group found the message to be succinct and provided positive comments. One member of the group commented that the communication used just the right number of words to get the message across. Another member of the group commented that it may be beneficial to use the words “young person” rather than “child” as this links in with wording used in centres. A comment was made in relation to using the word “realises” saying that it may be better to use wording such as “appreciates” which sounds less of a surprise.

In relation to the proposed communications to educators, the group commented that they believed the message would “land pretty well”. One member of the group commented that acknowledging the issue with coursework was a positive, however they were unsure about the use of the word “stability”.

The group discussed assurances as described in the communications and commented that these were important.

[redacted name] told the group that a group of learners would be brought together to provide comments on the above statements also.

JB thanked the group for their input.

5. Next Meeting

To be confirmed.