I want to share a few thoughts about SQA Modern Languages in particular since it is the area I have taught for the past 8 years, but also offer a different perspective for the system overall towards the end of my email.

I think the SQA curriculum for ML is woeful, uninspired and dire to learn and teach. It is examined through English which lacks rigour (especially at AH), and there is too much reliance upon dictionary use and memorisation skills. As a competent dictionary user, I excelled in an AH Italian reading paper with having about 5 words of Italian to my repertoire...What does that say about the exam? The authors and architects of the course could do with familiarising themselves with curricula elsewhere to see how it is done successfully and how exams can be used to support learning but not to guide it (Canada? Germany? Anywhere else really?). I teach the IB as well as SQA, and I would honestly opt to never again teach any SQA course if I had the choice for my own fulfilment. The topics are incredibly repetitive year upon year (how many times must we go over 'home area', 'holidays', 'family', etc.??); the exams are formulaic and do nothing but teach pupils a set of hoops to jump through as opposed to a language. It has made a subject out of a language and will continue to fail to appeal to pupils as a result.

If you put an IB pupil in a room with an SQA pupil and a native speaker of the studied language, I can guarantee the IB pupil would be able to conduct a conversation far more easily, accurately and confidently than the SQA counterpart - especially if it deviated from 'the script'. There is little wonder people in the UK are monolingual as a general rule - language teaching and learning is utterly uninspiring and soul-destroying from a teacher's perspective.

Finally, having come from a completely different context myself, I cannot understand why the government cares to examine 3 consecutive years in every subject offered. I presume it is so that everyone feels as important as the next in terms of the hierarchy of subjects, but I can't see another reason why. In my native province of Canada, the government only externally examined maths, sciences, English and French (as both are official languages), and one subject in S4 (History) and S5 (Economics). The rest didn't matter nationally/provincially and teachers were trusted to have professionalism and deliver quality courses without having to teach to a test. The outcome was that I was barely aware of exams while I was learning skills and content, I wasn't stressed about school at any point, and I ended up in a world top 20 university in spite of only a handful of my subjects being examined externally. Could we learn from other countries where pupils aren't so stressed? I don't think we're doing our kids any favours by putting them through exams all the time once they reach 16. I have never before come across so many stressed out teenagers and I think the system exacerbates the pressure they feel as they progress through secondary education.
I am sorry for the rant, but I really don't rate the system overall, and despair that my child will have to go through it. I often muse about leaving the profession as well - if we did not offer the IB as an alternative curriculum at my school, I think I may have thrown in the towel by now.

I am happy to be contacted to discuss any of this in more detail.

Sincerely,

Emilie Robinson