Context

I am a teacher of 35 years’ experience. I am currently Faculty Leader for Science at Largs Academy, North Ayrshire. The comments that follow are based on my own experience as a marker, as a class teacher and as a faculty leader.

As a marker

The experience has been a good one. This is vital work which also greatly enhances my teaching. I have a better understanding of the depth to which I need to teach and the vagaries of a marking scheme that I need to emphasise to my classes. This is shared with colleagues at network and within the faculty.

When members of staff engage with SQA as team leaders however the commitment from schools is too great. The number of days out of school has a big effect on departments. SQA should look at another strategy.

It also appears that the quality of setter and marker is in decline. I know of at least 2 examples where setters do not teach the subject at that level, have poor results, yet are setting for SQA.

As a class teacher and Faculty Leader of Science

Unit Assessments

The provision of support for Unit Assessments has been very poor.

Unit assessments were issued – only one per unit – with the expectation that school would amend them for errors and create their own subsequent assessment which would then require verification. This had to happen all over the country creating a huge unnecessary workload for staff.

The standard of assessment is so low that it gives an unrealistic expectation for pupils and parents as to the likelihood of success in the final exam.

No marks were allocated – presumably a style of formative assessment was the idea – and then change occurred and marks were to be added. Again huge workload.

The impact on photocopying budgets has also been immense.
Recent changes to documentation - since the mandate from Mr. Swinney – has meant a large number of hours spent checking and amending papers, especially in Physics.

*External examinations.*

The first year of the cfe higher not all schools had to present – some presented the old higher. This meant a big disadvantage to those of us forced to go ahead. Our pupils did not perform as well as we would have expected. We have redressed this for subsequent cohorts but the impact on those who sat that year was far reaching. Universities did not know the situation and so pupils were not successful in gaining places on courses of their choice. This especially affected the high tariff course applicants.

The style of the first exam also did not reflect the style of the exemplar and specimen papers.

*Assignments*

The introduction of assignments as a sizeable percentage of the marks for the final exam is a detrimental, backward step in closing the attainment gap. I have spent 35 years ‘levelling the playing field’ only to have it raised again in one fell swoop.

Experience should have informed those in charge of implementation. In the old style Standard Grade Investigations virtually all pupils gained a grade 1. Schools were pressured into making sure that happened. Now we have another assessment instrument that achieves very little and there is no guarantee it is the child’s work.

The research phase can be done with parental help. No account is taken of the child who has unsupportive parents, parents unable to support, those with no internet access.

SQA know that some teachers are not following the instructions from SQA – whole classes do the same assignment, using the same data, drafts are marked by some staff with examiners finding ‘post-its’ still attached to the papers.

This should have been an unseen case study. Skills could be practiced at school and then pupils would complete the same one under exam conditions as part of the final exam. Much fairer.

*Communication*

Dire!

The website is poor. I have spent hours trying to find Examiners reports and other documents I know must be there but are almost hidden on the site.

If it had not been for the email groups such as Synapse for the Biologists and Sputnik for the Physicists I would know a fraction of the important amendments and reworks.
I would not have known about this opportunity!

In conclusion I need to say that the teaching profession has worked extremely hard in the face of this adversity to maintain standards of teaching and learning. The degree of sharing of resources has increased greatly using the aforementioned internet contacts. We have more than done a good job but have been badly let down by SQA. It’s only the dedication of the profession that has prevented industrial action to this point and that cannot be relied upon to continue. Good will is being lost daily.

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