

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

2nd Meeting, 2021 (Session 6), Wednesday, 1
September 2021

PE1861: Use teacher assessed grades to
award national qualifications in 2021

Note by the Clerk

Petitioners	Oliver Smith
Petition summary	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use teacher assessed grades rather than exam like assessments in awarding national qualifications in 2021.
Webpage	petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1861

Introduction

1. This is a new petition that has been under consideration since 24 March 2021.
2. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures and comments on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 86 signatures and 4 comments have been received. Members may wish to note that petitions lodged in Session 6 can collect signatures only.
4. In Session 5, the Public Petitions Committee agreed to seek advanced views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. The Committee has received a response from the Scottish Government and this is included at **Annexe B** of this paper.

Scottish Government submission

5. In its written submission, the Scottish Government states that the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) developed to replace the examination diet in 2021 was based on teacher judgement of demonstrated learner attainment.
6. The ACM was co-created by the National Qualifications 2021 Group. The Group was chaired by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and comprised of representatives from—
 - the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland,
 - Colleges Scotland,
 - Education Scotland,
 - the Educational Institute of Scotland,
 - School Leaders Scotland,
 - the Scottish Council of Independent Schools,
 - the Scottish Government,
 - the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and
 - the Scottish Youth Parliament.
7. In its submission, the Scottish Government highlights that the ACM gave schools and colleges flexibility to draw upon a range of sources to evidence learners' demonstrated attainment, stating that it would enable fair and consistent awarding for all.
8. It asserts that the SQA gave a flexible and consistent framework for schools and colleges, and provided—
 - subject specific guidance to teachers and lecturers to support them gather evidence on which they could base provisional results;
 - assessment resources to support the gathering of that evidence; and
 - guidance advising the reduction in evidence requirements, removal of assessment components and reduction of content and context in many subjects.
9. In its submission, the Scottish Government notes that where robust and reliable, schools could use a range of evidence to inform judgements on provisional results.
10. Recognising the disruption that young people have experienced during the school year, the Scottish Government further notes that the submission date for provisional grades was extended to give more time for learning and teaching and gathering of evidence.
11. In the background information of the petition, the petitioner raises concerns about the strain that young people have been under throughout the pandemic. He also highlights the pressures on Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and the consequential difficulties in young people accessing those services in a timely manner.

12. In response, the Scottish Government states that the mental health of children and young people is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government.
13. The submission highlights that all adults working in schools have a responsibility to support and develop mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. It further highlights the importance of young people developing resilience and coping skills
14. The Scottish Government also highlights that it has distributed £15m to local authorities to support the mental wellbeing 5-24 year olds in their communities, £11.25m of which is for services in response to the pandemic.
15. In its submission, the Scottish Government assures that it supports mental health and wellbeing in schools and education through actions such as the Mental Health in Schools Working Group and counselling in schools. It also invests in a range of other resources to support young people including digital resources on mental health and wellbeing.
16. Recognising the impact that Covid-19 has had on the ability of services to see people, the Scottish Government published its [Mental Health Transition and recovery Plan](#) in October. As part of this, it set out a number of actions which aims to improve access to CAMHS.
17. In correspondence with the clerks, the petitioner has asked, as the year 2021 has passed in terms of exams and work is underway in reforming the SQA and Education Scotland, that this petition be removed from the petition process.
18. As Committee members will also be aware, the Scottish Government announced on 9 August 2021 that school exams will go ahead as normal in 2022 if it is safe for them to do so.

Action

19. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

Clerk to the Committee

SPICe**The Information Centre**
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh**Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee****Petition Number:** [PE1861](#)**Main Petitioner:** Oliver Smith**Subject:** Use teacher assessed grades to award national qualifications in 2021

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to use teacher assessed grades rather than exam-like assessments in awarding national qualifications in 2021.

Introduction

In 2021, certification for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications will not require an externally moderated exam. For National 5 qualifications, this was announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, John Swinney MSP, on 7 October 2020 and a further announcement was made on [8 December 2020](#) in respect to Highers and Advanced Highers. There are other National Qualifications which do not require an exam and schools can offer a wide range of other courses leading to qualifications. The petitioner appears to be concerned with National 5s, Highers and Advanced Highers and this paper will reflect that.

Prior to these announcements, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (“SQA”) undertook [a consultation and announced changes to the coverage of qualifications](#), in many cases reducing content or requirements, to support certification in 2021. The aim was to “mitigate some of the current challenges faced by the teaching community in Scottish schools, while maintaining the validity, reliability and practicability of the qualifications.”

Alternative Certification Model

The approach to the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) this year is that “teachers and lecturers will be providing SQA with provisional results based on their professional judgement of learner assessment evidence measured

against the published requirements for each subject.”¹ The overall approach has been developed through the National Qualifications Group².

The process for the ACM is to have five stages:

Stage 1: ongoing until April 2021 - Teachers and lecturers access subject specific guidance, assessment resources and Understanding Standards materials and webinars from SQA.

Stage 2: April - May 2021 - School, college, training provider and local authority quality assurance continues. During May, SQA requests, reviews and provides feedback on assessment evidence from each school, college and training provider.

Stage 3: end May to 25 June 2021 - Schools, colleges, training providers, local authorities and SQA work through final stages of local and national quality assurance and feedback, to reach provisional results that are consistent, equitable and fair.

Stage 4: by 25 June 2021 - Schools, colleges and training providers submit quality assured provisional results to SQA.

Learners are expected to receive their SQA results on **10 August 2021**.

Stage 5: Appeals process for 2020-21 - to be advised following [consultation](#).

The [SQA has produced overall guidance](#) on the approach to gathering evidence and producing estimates for national courses. This guidance stated:

“An estimate is a holistic professional judgement based on evidence of a candidate’s attainment in all aspects of the course (ie all course components) and should reflect the candidate’s demonstrated attainment of the required skills, knowledge and understanding for the estimated grade and band. Reviewing a range of evidence will help to build up a picture of the candidate’s performance as a whole, which will then enable you to decide on an estimate.”

¹ [Joint letter from Education Scotland and the SQA, to the Education and Skills Committee 19 Feb 2021](#)

² * The National Qualifications 2021 Group is represented by the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Government, National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

The SQA has published subject and level specific guidance. Each course advice can be different. A common theme is that good evidence is likely to be similar to an exam, perhaps using SQA exam scripts.

Wellbeing

Exams can be a stressful time for young people in any given year, and guidance and support is available (e.g. [NHS Scotland](#)). The petitioner believes that mental health and wellbeing concerns would be exacerbated by sitting tests which would constitute evidence for the purposes of certification.

The impact of the pandemic on young people's wellbeing and particularly their mental health has been a concern across the UK. A number of organisations have undertaken surveys of young people. Young Minds (a UK-wide mental health charity) has undertaken several surveys. [Its most recent survey, at the time of writing, was undertaken in February 2021](#). It found "that the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to have a devastating impact on many young people with a history of mental health needs."

Wellbeing has been a key feature in planning in relation to the return to in-person schooling both in August 2020 and in 2021. The Cabinet Secretary's foreword to the [National Improvement Framework](#) published in December 2020 stated—

"Education recovery will be key in the year ahead, with a continued focus on health and wellbeing, as well as intensified support for reducing inequity and enabling the highest quality of learning and teaching."

Since January, [Education Scotland has undertaken and published weekly national overviews of practice in remote learning](#). This has included looking at support for the wellbeing of learners, their families, staff and the school community. This review stated—

"All local authorities highlight how they are prioritising support for health and wellbeing. They have strengthened their focus on supporting the emotional, social and physical needs of children, young people and their families. Headteachers describe how staff know children well and provide a wide range of support to help meet their individual wellbeing needs and circumstances. Through regular check-ins with children and young people, staff now have an increased focus on discussing emotional and mental wellbeing."

Relevant organisations

The Committee may wish to explore the issues raised by this petition with:

[Scottish Qualifications Authority \(SQA\)](#)

[Scottish Government](#)

Teaching trade unions

[SAMH](#)

[YoungScot](#)

[Scottish Youth Parliament](#)

[Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland](#)

[Connect](#)

[National Parent Forum of Scotland](#)

Ned Sharratt
Senior Researcher
24 March 2021

SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

Scottish Government submission of 7 June 2021

PE1861/A

Thank you for your e-mail of 12 May 2021 regarding the petition in relation to the 2021 National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model.

The Scottish Government has responded to a number of enquiries from Mr Smith in relation to this matter.

Assessment

It may help if I set out the basis of the approach to the assessment of National Qualifications this year.

The Alternative Certification Model developed to replace the examination diet this year is based on teacher judgement of demonstrated learner attainment, with provisional results for National 5, Higher and Advanced Highers to be submitted to the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) by 25 June 2021, and results published on 10 August 2021.

The Alternative Certification Model (ACM) has been co-created by the National Qualifications 2021 Group. The National Qualifications 2021 Group is chaired by the SQA and draws its membership from the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland, Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland, School Leaders Scotland, the Scottish Council of Independent Schools, the Scottish Government, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

In recognition of the differential impact of Covid-19 on learners across the country, a key feature of the ACM is that schools and colleges have the flexibility to draw upon a range of sources to evidence learners' demonstrated attainment and enable fair and consistent awarding for all.

The details of the ACM were outlined to Parliament by the First Minister on 16 February. The ACM timelines five [stages](#), outlining what should happen at each stage and where roles and responsibilities sit. SQA has provided a flexible and consistent framework for schools and colleges. This includes detailed subject-specific guidance, material and support for teachers and lecturers in gathering key assessment evidence as the basis for provisional results.

Assessment resources have been provided to schools by SQA to support this process, however, teachers and lecturers have the flexibility to decide whether and how to use these materials, which can be used in part or in their entirety.

Guidance suggests that evidence gathered later in the course will more likely allow a learner to demonstrate their abilities, however, evidence already collected under appropriate conditions can be used by a teacher or lecturer to inform a provisional result alongside evidence yet to be collected. Whilst maintaining the validity of the qualifications, this guidance includes reduced evidence requirements, removal of assessment components and reduction of content and context in many subjects in recognition of the disruption to learning this year.

Teachers and lecturers will have tracked learners' progress through the course of the year, and will have gathered a range of evidence to support projected grades. Where robust and reliable, schools can use this evidence to inform judgements on provisional results.

When considering evidence to support provisional results, schools will also take into account that the submission date for provisional results has been extended to 25 June. This was done to provide more time for learning and teaching and gathering of evidence.

In a statement to Parliament on 2 June 2021, the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills reiterated key aspects of the ACM and announced details of a free appeals service, available directly to learners for the first time, covering this year's National 5, Higher, and Advanced Higher qualifications. Information on the [2021 Appeals Service](#) can be found on the SQA website.

It is recognised that there has been ongoing disruption for learners in some parts of Scotland, and a few learners have been impacted by severe disruption to their learning. A contingency arrangement has, therefore, been put in place for learners who have completed their courses but for whom the required evidence demonstrating their attainment cannot be gathered within the flexibilities already provided. Under these arrangements, there will be a limited opportunity for those 3 learners to undertake assessments later and submit provisional results by the later date of 3 September.

Learners' Mental Health and Wellbeing

Ministers recognise that studying towards qualifications can be a stressful time for many learners in any year. In the current challenging circumstances, pressures related to the Senior Phase may be compounded by the impact of Covid-19, both educationally and socially, on young people.

The mental health of children and young people is an absolute priority for the Scottish Government.

All adults working in schools are responsible for supporting and developing mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing. Every school should help their young people to develop resilience and personal coping skills, and it is critical that learners, and teachers, are supported to ensure measures are in place to support those who are worried about their learning, the assessment of their learning or around the specific support available with regard to an additional support need.

We would encourage any learner, parent or carer concerned about any aspect of learning, support, assessment or the approach taken by their school to discuss this with teaching or support staff at their school.

The Committee may also be interested to note that the National Qualifications 2021 Group has issued, through SQA, a letter to learners signposting them to a variety of academic, vocation and health and wellbeing supports. This letter is available online with a hard copy being posted to all learners. A copy of the letter can be accessed at: https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/NQ21-letter-supports-for-learners.pdf

Last year, we announced funding of £15 million to be distributed to local authorities to support the mental wellbeing 5-24 year olds in their communities. Of this, £11.25 million is for services in response to the pandemic and the remaining £3.75 million is funding new and enhanced community mental health and wellbeing services, focussing on prevention, early intervention and the treatment of distress.

We continue to prioritise support for mental health and wellbeing in schools and education through actions such as the Mental Health in Schools Working Group and counselling in schools. We have also 4 invested in a range of other measures to support young peoples including digital resources on mental health and wellbeing available via Young Scot's platform Aye Feel.

Mental health was identified as a clinical priority for NHS remobilisation. However, Covid-19 has impacted on services' ability to see people, and so emergency and urgent cases have been prioritised.

Ministers recognise that this has had a knock-on effect in terms of timescales for the delivery of treatment and care. Services are now in the process of returning to previous levels of activity and dealing with any backlogs that have developed. This is being monitored through NHS Boards' remobilisation plans. A number of Boards have focussed on children and young people who have been waiting the longest and we are directing support to those Boards not on track to meet the standard.

In the [Mental Health Transition and recovery Plan](#), published in October, a number of actions were set out to progress improvement on access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

These included the implementation of our CAMHS service specification and tailored support for NHS Boards to help clearly identify the challenges in these service areas and potential solutions. We are working with Mental Health leads in these Boards to implement recovery plans.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic will have, and has had, a substantial impact on the mental health of the population. We have been working closely with stakeholders to develop our approach to transition and recovery for mental health. Our approach will be evidence-led to ensure we meet the emerging needs of the people of Scotland, both immediately and in the medium and long-term.

Recognising the substantial impact on the population's mental health, early on in the pandemic period we announced over £18 million of additional funding to respond to

the challenge. We also launched our Clear Your Head campaign, which has been updated over time as rules and restrictions change. This provides practical advice on how to stay active, keep connected with friends and family, and create healthy routines to help get through the crisis.

Those who need extra support are directed to helplines operated by 5 NHS 24, Breathing Space, and Samaritans, and to a range of other resources including NHS Inform, the Scottish Recovery Network, Young Scot, Healthy Working Lives and The Spark. People can find the right help for them by visiting www.nhsinform.scot/mind or through the NHS24 helpline on 111.

I hope the Committee find this information helpful.