

20 April 2021

Dear parent/carer

As we start our new term after the Easter break, we know that young people in the Senior Phase of secondary school and their families may be feeling understandably anxious. You will probably have questions about what lies ahead with assessments and results this year.

As you know, following the cancellation of exams by the Scottish Government, the way your results will be decided this year (known as the alternative certification model) has been created by the National Qualifications 2021 Group, which includes professionals from across the education system, as well as parents/carers and young person's representatives.

Results this year must be based on 'demonstrated attainment'. This means assessment evidence which shows that young people have the skills, knowledge, and understanding needed to be awarded the correct grade for the course. It is important that results are based on actual evidence of learning and skills, so everyone can have confidence in them. This means that young people will have to undertake some assessments in school. However, the National Qualifications 2021 Group has been clear that there is no requirement for schools, colleges and training providers to carry out a diet of formal replacement exams or prelims. There is flexibility in how assessments can be undertaken. Depending on local circumstances, some assessment activity will take place in classrooms, and some might take place in school halls. Your own school will provide you with the details of what this will mean for you.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has given school teachers new guidance for each subject, to help them assess the skills, knowledge, and understanding young people must demonstrate, to be awarded the correct grade for the course. There has been disruption to learning this year, with the long periods of remote learning. In view of this, the amount of evidence needed for each course has been reduced to a minimum, while making sure that your qualifications remain highly respected among future education providers and employers.

If you have questions about the assessments or any other concerns, including if personal circumstances mean a young person is unable to take part in any assessments, you should speak to your school as soon as possible to let them know and to discuss an appropriate solution. Teachers want young people to do as well as possible this year and are planning very carefully how to make sure that courses are finished in time, and that assessments are fair and in line with national standards. This includes re-assessments where that is appropriate.

Teachers know the young people in their classes best and they will talk to you about how and when they will be assessed. They will let you know the arrangements for when assessments

are taking place and which evidence will count towards the final grade. You can also raise any issues or personal circumstances with your school at this time, and discuss potential supports or adjustments. This includes assessment arrangements for any young people who need additional support for their learning, or who have been shielding.

The first priority, once everyone is back in school, is to make sure that all of the teaching and learning for each course and level is completed and that young people reach the point where they are ready for the assessments that will contribute to the final grades. Your teachers will provide feedback on young people's progress which will help with preparation for the important assessments that lie ahead.

The summer term has been a stressful time for young people, even in more normal years, because the formal SQA examination diet tended to put a lot of pressure on candidates. This year, the teachers who know the young people in their classes very well will be making the final decisions about the grades that will appear on certificates in August. This is a huge responsibility and one that we all take very seriously as we work together to ensure that the final grades are accurate and fairly reflect young people's knowledge and understanding. The SQA and Education Scotland will be working with The Highland Council and our individual schools, as well as with schools elsewhere in Scotland, to make sure that the whole process is fair across the country.

If you have any questions about any of this (for example about the learning that still needs to take place, or about the assessment arrangements) please contact your school in the first instance.

Kind regards



Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning