

People Directorate

Depute Chief Executive and Director - People: Douglas Hutchison

County Buildings
Wellington Square
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Our Ref: DH/LD

Your Ref

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Dear Parent / Carer

Alternative Certification Model for SQA Qualifications

I am writing to update you on arrangements for what is being called the Alternative Certification Model which replaces the normal SQA exams this year. In addition, I wanted to take the opportunity to remind you that Lateral Flow Device tests are freely available in school for all secondary aged pupils. Lateral Flow Testing will be an important way of protecting all pupils and staff from outbreaks in schools. They allow us to detect cases at the earliest opportunity with thousands of our young people and staff already carrying out the test at home twice each week. I would ask you to encourage and support use of the home test kits that are available for collection in school. I would also ask you to ensure that young people are sticking to the guidance and limiting their social interaction in line with the guidance. Almost none of the recent cases in schools relate to activities within the school but have a significant impact on young people's ability to complete courses and the associated assessment required as evidence for the Alternative Certification Model.

S4 to S6 assessment arrangements

You will be aware that as a result of the pandemic, earlier this school year, the Deputy First Minister announced the cancellation of the SQA exams. Following that decision, the SQA developed guidance to support schools in their decisions on provisional grades for young people.

We are in very different circumstances from where we were in March 2020 when the SQA asked schools to use inferred attainment to arrive at provisional grades for young people. Inferred attainment means teachers making judgements based on their knowledge of the pupils and what they judge they would have achieved in an exam. This session the SQA have made it very clear that inferred attainment cannot be used and provisional grades are arrived at from judgement based on demonstrated attainment, that means there needs to be actual assessment evidence. Schools must be in possession of robust assessment evidence that reflects the provisional grade the school has awarded.

The SQA have developed guidance for each subject at every level from National 4 to Advanced Higher. The guidance outlines the types of evidence that should be used to support judgements of provisional grades.

Quality Assurance processes

Trust in the process by which young people are given provisional grades is crucial and quality assurance of these judgements is central to building trust. As such, I want to outline all the steps that will take place before final provisional grades are submitted to the SQA on the 25th of June.

SQA Quality Assurance: The SQA will carry out quality assurance which involves schools submitting examples of pupil assessment from a range of subjects and levels. They will then provide feedback on the assessment judgements that have been made by the teachers involved. The purpose of this is to ensure that subject teachers are consistently applying the standards at each of the levels (National 5, Higher and Adv Higher).

School Level: Working within both national guidance from the SQA and local authority guidance, each school has developed approaches to ensure that the national standards at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher are applied consistently. The steps involved include:

- Teachers undertaking SQA assessment training specific to their subject and level.

- The assessments that are used to inform provisional grades have been through a process that involves other schools to ensure they are consistent with the national standard.
- Cross-marking of assessments by different teachers to ensure consistency across teachers within a subject.
- Where available, teachers who undertake work as SQA markers are used to ensure judgements are in line with the national standards.

Head teachers and depute head teachers within each of the eight secondary schools have been working closely with principal teachers and faculty heads to discuss approaches and monitor assessment activity. These checks will continue right up to provisional grades being submitted to the SQA.

South Ayrshire Council Level: Teachers from across the eight secondary schools have been meeting regularly within their subject areas to discuss assessment of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. Agreed actions include:

- Subjects have agreed areas where a consistent approach to assessment can be taken.
- Schools have worked together to ensure the assessments used to inform provisional grades are valid and consistent with the national standard.
- Quality assurance activity across schools is taking place and includes a range of activity for each subject and level such as sampling assessment evidence from other schools and providing feedback.
- Experienced teachers who undertake work for the SQA, such as marking, are taking a lead role in quality assurance activity across schools to ensure national standards are applied consistently.

Throughout the process, Quality Improvement Managers from the central education team have been working closely with schools to ensure that the appropriate processes and checks are in place at all levels. Members of the Quality Improvement team will meet with all schools individually prior to the submission of provisional results to SQA to discuss the pattern of attainment.

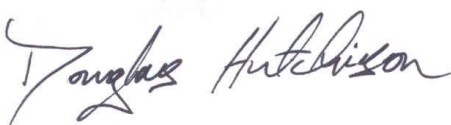
Additional in-service days in June

The First Minister recognised the need for robust quality assurance when she announced two additional in-service days focused on assessment. You will already know that in South Ayrshire the additional days will be on Friday 11th June and Monday 14th of June. Any assessment results communicated prior to these dates are provisional and may be subject to change as part of the quality assurance process. Provisional grades will be communicated to young people and parents/carers on Tuesday 22nd June.

My intention in this letter is to keep you informed of what is happening in relation to the Alternative Certification Model, give you key dates in the process and to try and reassure you that as a local authority we are doing everything possible to ensure that the provisional grades young people receive are robust and reliable. Teachers who have built up a relationship with your children over years want your children to get the best results they possibly can while ensuring a system that is consistent with the national advice and will stand up to external scrutiny. HM Inspectors from Education Scotland have already visited to review our arrangements and will report back later in May. More than anything else, we want every young person's results to reflect the hard work that they have put in during their time at secondary and especially over the past incredibly challenging year.

My thanks once again to all our secondary staff who I know are working incredibly hard to ensure our young people get the best possible results. Thanks also to you for your support of our schools and the young people of South Ayrshire.

Yours faithfully



Douglas Hutchison
Depute Chief Executive and Director - People