

17th June 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

SHARING SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY PROVISIONAL GRADES

Throughout this term, staff in schools have been working with young people to complete Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) courses and to carry out enough assessment activity to allow candidates to demonstrate the skills, knowledge and understanding necessary for a provisional grade to be awarded. As we get closer to the SQA deadline for submitting these grades (25 June) schools will be sharing the provisional grades with learners. Schools know their learners best and have the flexibility to determine the approach to sharing provisional results that best fits the needs and circumstances of their learners.

The SQA's Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was designed to allow some flexibility for schools to create a plan for assessment activity that suited their local circumstances (such as staffing and accommodation issues, the dates on which courses were completed, the fact that young people and staff may have been affected by self-isolation and so on). All of our school plans had to be designed in line with the guidance provided by the SQA, which published specific advice for each subject and level, stating how assessment had to be designed and administered. Teachers had to follow this guidance. Because of the degree of flexibility that SQA built in to the ACM, schools will be ready to share the provisional grades with learners at different times from 17 June onwards. Your own school will have told you when you can expect to be hearing about the final provisional grades.

Your child's teachers will have discussed with learners the assessment evidence that was used to support the decisions about provisional grades. During the time between 17 June and 25 June it will be very important that learners have conversations with their teachers if they would like any further discussion to understand exactly why the provisional grades have been chosen, based on the evidence.

For a small number of pupils who have experienced extreme disruption during the school's evidence gathering process (for example, medical issues, self-isolation or bereavement), contingency arrangements may be put in place to ensure sufficient evidence has been gathered. Your school will advise if this applies to your child.

On 25 June, the grades will all be sent to the SQA, who will process the data ready to release certificates to learners on 10 August, results day. This year, the SQA have undertaken not to change the grades that have been submitted by teachers, so the grades that appear on certificates in August will be the same as the grades that schools share with candidates from 17 June onwards.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

A lot of work has been done to make sure that the grades teachers submit to the SQA are fair and accurate. Here are some of the activities that have been carried out for this purpose:

- Teachers have made use of support materials provided by SQA to ensure that assessments and marking are at the correct national standard;
- Teachers have cross-marked pupil assessments with other teachers in their own school (where there are other teachers covering the same subjects), and with teachers from other schools, to ensure consistency of marking approaches;
- Highland Council has helped schools to make links to support this cross-marking where necessary, including establishing some links with schools in other parts of Scotland;
- The SQA have sampled courses from every school and have provided feedback to teachers, telling them that they are either exactly in line with national standards or if they should adjust some aspects of their judgements;

- Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education (HMIe) carried out a review of Highland Council's approach to implementing the Alternative Certification Model;
- Principal Teachers, Faculty Heads, Depute Head Teachers and Head Teachers have been involved in quality assurance discussions about every course and every level;
- Highland Council officers are meeting Senior Leadership Teams in all of our schools before the submission date of 25 June to quality assure the overall results in each school;
- Throughout all of these processes Highland Council officers have provided support and advice to schools as required to help schools make sure that their provisional grades are decided in line with SQA guidance.

This is the first time SQA grades have been arrived at in this way, and it has placed a very serious responsibility on school staff as they have taught courses, carried out assessments, checked their marking is accurate and arrived at final grades. We are very grateful to all school staff for their work on the ACM and we have complete faith in their commitment to awarding the correct grades for our young people.

APPEALS

On Wednesday 2 June, Shirley-Anne Somerville, the Scottish Government's Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, announced details of the appeals process that will provide an extra level of scrutiny to make sure that the grades awarded are fair. Every young person taking SQA courses will have received a letter from the SQA explaining how the appeals process will work. One of the strengths of the appeals system this year is that young people themselves can decide to submit an appeal:

- if, after discussions with their teacher about their provisional grade they feel that there has been an academic error in the decision made;
- if they feel that there has been an administrative mistake in the grade that has been submitted; or
- if they believe that they need to appeal on the grounds of discrimination.

Your school will help with advice about appeals if necessary.

It is important that learners think very carefully before submitting any appeals, because the SQA and Scottish Government have stressed that when the assessment evidence is considered as part of an appeal the grade could stay the same, it could be raised, or it could be lowered. Learners and their parents/carers should discuss queries about provisional grades with the school before the final submission of the provisional results and this will help with any decisions about appeals.

As mentioned above, there have been many checks put in place during this term to make sure assessment judgements are as fair as can possibly be the case under this year's Alternative Certification Model. In some cases, an appeal may provide one final check.

CONCLUSION

This has been a very challenging school year in many ways and we very much appreciate the hard work and patience of learners, families and school staff as we have worked through the demands of this year's certification arrangements. We are all fully committed to working to make sure that the correct grades are awarded to every candidate in every course and will continue to support our young people up to and including the submission of grades and throughout the appeals process.

Yours faithfully



Nicky Grant
Executive Chief Officer, Education and Learning