



**REPORT TO: EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND ORGANISATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE ON 23 SEPTEMBER 2020**

SUBJECT: SQA AND ESTIMATE PROCESSES FOR EXAM DIET 2020

**BY: DEPUTE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (EDUCATION, COMMUNITIES AND
ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT)**

1. REASON FOR REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Committee of the SQA estimate processes following school closures due to the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent cancellation of the exam diet for session 2019/20. This will support a further report at the next committee where SQA results and Insight data will be fully scrutinised.
- 1.2 This report is submitted to the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Committee following a decision of Moray Council on 17 June 2020 to agree a simplify committee structure as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of this committee the combining of delegated responsibilities of Children and Young People Services, Governance, Strategy and Performance, (para 9 of the minute refers)

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **It is recommended that the Committee:**
- (i) considers and notes the processes undertaken for the completion of SQA estimates as a contributing component of wider performance information**
 - (ii) acknowledges the continuing uncertainty following school return and the potential disruption to learning during session 2020/21 as we await guidance and expectations regarding exam diet 2021.**

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 SQA Exam Diet 2020

SQA announced on 19 March 2020 that this year's diet of exams would not go ahead due to the coronavirus pandemic and schools across Scotland closed on 20 March 2020.

3.2 SQA provided a range of updates for schools and local authorities on 24 March 2020 regarding National Qualification exams at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher as well as for exam coursework, which is usually a contributing element of the assessment mark, and on 2 April 2020 as to the timescales for gathering and submitting estimates and for candidate certification. Further advice on estimates was issued by 20 April 2020.

3.3 Within Moray, each secondary school has an SQA Coordinator and the group meet regularly with the local authority SQA Coordinator; these meetings take place 4 times a year and are attended by SQA personnel when appropriate and have a focus on both operational aspects of exam processes as well as developing strategy in a range of areas such as Internal Verification, Additional Assessment Arrangements etc. As this was an established team who work successfully this ensured that the processes and expectations were clear and successfully implemented.

3.4 In preparation for the collation and submission of estimates, the QIM developed and shared 5 briefing papers and coordinated 5 virtual meetings with SQA Coordinators and Headteachers to ensure a consistent and robust process. This was supported by the local authority SQA Coordinator attending Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES) meetings in relation to this. ADES were working closely with SQA and Scottish Government to provide national guidance and support.

3.5 In providing estimates, the focus across Moray was:

- Use of teacher professional judgement in order to estimate the learner grade and band based on their demonstrated and inferred attainment of required skills, knowledge and understanding for each National Course – this was a process that had not previously been undertaken in senior phase examinations and required a review of assessment processes and expectations as well as evaluation of the full range of evidence
- Demonstrated and inferred attainment means that teachers used any assessed coursework that has been accumulated during the course, and also took into account their knowledge of the progress young people have made with knowledge, skills and understanding, even when this was not explicitly assessed
- There was no requirement for additional prelims or homework tasks to determine the estimate although in some cases across Scotland this did take place

- The estimate was developed as a judgement of a grade and band based on a holistic review of all available assessment evidence as well as additional information gathered from pupil performance and tracking and monitoring over the course of the school year
- It was of vital importance that the improvements young people made in the latter parts of the course after the prelim exam were taken into account, even though teachers may not have had additional evidence of that improvement. There was no process nationally to monitor this although it would have an impact of the quality and level of estimate provided

3.6 Moray Quality Assurance Processes

In order to ensure that there was a robust estimate submission, a local quality assurance process was put in place.

- **Within** departments there was robust discussion about estimates, with this discussion led by Principal Teachers (PTs). The purpose of these discussions was to ensure that there was consistency in the way that decisions were made about estimates taking into account attainment which is completed and that which relies upon teacher professional judgement
- **Between** departments the Principal Teachers liaised with each other within a school to ensure that there was consistency of approach, and also used subject group networks to support consistency and reliability across the authority – this was promoted with subject PTs
- Many **new PTs** received additional support and practical solutions in the collation of evidence and the estimates for young people; Senior Leadership Team (SLT) link and subject groups provided this as well as PT mentors across this school as for some of them this was the first time they have led this element within their role
- The role of Principal Teachers of Guidance provided pupil information to subject based decisions
- **SLT** in schools lead and supported these processes by liaising with link departments to monitor the process and quality assured the decisions being made – there was also an opportunity for an element of challenge, this included looking at prior attainment, considering improvement actions which have taken place and the use of tracking, monitoring and target setting

3.7 Datasets – there was a clear rationale for using datasets for the previous 5 years where estimates and actual marks were used to support the agreement of this year's estimates in line with a concordant approach and for ranking – to this end 2015-2019 actual marks and rankings for each graded subject and level was provided for schools to use with their 2020 estimates to support this process as well as ranking of S4, S5 and S6 breadth and depth. The ranking of pupils had previously been undertaken but had not been a process for a number of years and as such many of the SQA Coordinators had to become upskilled in this area. The Research and Information Officer provided an additional range of spreadsheets with pivot tables to support and challenge the estimates being generated. This aided the moderation processes in all

schools and we were able to measure concordancy with previous performance information.

- 3.8 As a final component of the processes in Moray, each school had a meeting with the local authority SQA Coordinator to quality assure the estimate data and sign off for final submission within the deadline. In Moray, we submitted 100% of estimates required.

4. SQA RESULTS 2020

- 4.1 SQA results were received as expected on 4 August 2020 for all our senior pupils.

- 4.2 The Quality Improvement Manager and Research and Information Officer undertook a range of performance analysis and an overview of this was provided for elected members at Members Briefing on 6 August 2020 as well as our press release. This would normally be reported to Committee after the September release of Insight, the Senior Phase Benchmarking Toolkit.

- 4.3 On 11 August, the Deputy First Minister announced that further to the release of SQA results on 4 August 2020 and in response to concerns from a range of stakeholders, all candidates would now be awarded their estimate grade if this was higher than the grade awarded on 4 August 2020 or the grade awarded on 4 August 2020 if this was higher than the estimate. In Moray, 5% of estimates were upgraded at SQA moderation level and thus the candidates were permitted to keep this grade and 32% of estimates were upgraded from the grades awarded on 4 August 2020. 63% of our estimates were equal to the award initially given. At National 5 level across S4-S6, this has reflected an increase of 29% in awards due to pupils now receiving their estimates, 40% at Higher and 33% at Advanced Higher. In many cases, this is a change of band which does not result in an increase in grade; for example a candidate may have been awarded a band 4 which has now been changed to a band 3 but this is still within the Grade B boundary. Candidates affected will receive a revised exam certificate and currently central officers are updating attainment analysis data.

- 4.4 Schools are currently supporting the appeals process, which allows for consideration of estimates given. The 3 criteria for appeals are:

- an administrative error was made when they submitted their estimate or entry information for a candidate
- a candidate's estimate was affected by discrimination or other conduct by the centre
- an error within SQA's internal processes for confirming results to centres following the 11 August announcement

Within Moray we anticipate few appeals due to the rigour of our estimate process during April and May 2020. The appeals process will be concluded by the end of September 2020 and if necessary revised certificates provided for candidates.

- 4.5 An updated SQA Attainment Overview following the Scottish Government announcement on 11 August 2020 is attached in Appendix 1 and will be further reported on once data from Insight, the Scottish Benchmarking Tool, when released in September 2020.
- 4.6 It is not known the format of the exam diet for session 2020 and following school return there is not 100% of learning and teaching or delivery of curricular areas possible due to increased processes required in school and as such pupils, schools, parents, communities, businesses and elected members should be aware of this with regard to future attainment and performance across Moray and Scotland.

5. **SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

(a) Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan (Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP))

The Policy was informed by the priorities within the Corporate Plan and 10 Year Plan and in particular to Ambitious and Confident Children and Young People and A Growing and Diverse Economy.

(b) Policy and Legal

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

(c) Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

(d) Risk Implications

There are risk implications as to how this attainment dataset will be used as comparator data for the next 3-5 years and may skew future performance reporting.

(e) Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report.

(f) Property

None.

(g) Equalities/Socio Economic Impact

An Equality/Socio Economic Impact Assessment is not required as this report is to inform Committee on performance.

(h) Consultations

Senior Officers in Education, Communities and Organisational Development, Paul Connor, Principal Accountant, Equal Opportunities Officer, Human Resources Manager, Tracey Sutherland, Committee Services Officer have been consulted and are in agreement with the contents of this report as regards their respective responsibilities.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Committee is invited to consider and note the SQA estimate process in preparation for the full 2020 attainment report at the next Committee meeting

6.2 The Committee is asked to consider the potential impact on exams and performance for session 2020/21

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Background Papers:

Ref: SPMAN-1108985784-263