

Coronavirus (Covid-19) – Equalities Impact and Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment: Replacement of National Qualifications Exams in 2021 Session with an Alternative Certification Model

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Title of policy	Replacement of National Qualifications exams in 2020-21 session with an alternative certification model (ACM)
Summary of aims and desired outcomes of policy	This policy aims to secure fairness in how learners' achievement will be recognised during Covid-19 related disruption to learning in 2020-21, whilst ensuring confidence in the value of Scottish education.
Directorate: Division: Team	Learning Directorate: Curriculum, Qualifications and Gaelic: Senior Phase Unit

Coronavirus (COVID-19): Replacement of National Qualifications exams in 2020-21 session with an alternative certification model

1. Executive Summary

The aim of the policy to replace National Qualifications exams in 2020-21 session with an alternative certification model¹ (ACM) is to address the differential impact of Covid-19 across the country and to individual learners. This decision, by Scottish Ministers, has fairness at its heart, recognising the disproportionate impact caused by Covid-19 on Scotland's poorest and older pupils, and the lessons learnt from awarding in 2020.

This document is an assessment of the impact of replacing the exams for National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers for the 2020-21 school year with an ACM (co-designed by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) and key stakeholders) on groups with protected characteristics and/or those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, and collates the considerations of:

- An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)
- A Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)

It primarily focuses on the discrimination and advancement of equality of opportunity elements of the policy decision but also seeks to foster greater understanding of learners' needs and relations with these groups of learners.

A Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) scoping exercise has been considered separately, and we have concluded that a full CRWIA isn't necessary. We will publish this scoping exercise.

¹ The alternative certification model refers to the mechanism put in place for 2020-21 instead of exams. It is an alternative method of capturing and recording learners achievements.

Please note, this is **not** an EQIA and FSDA assessment of the ACM. This is being undertaken by SQA who are responsible for developing this approach in conjunction with members of the National Qualifications 2021 Group. This Group was established to co-create the ACM for 2021, and is chaired by SQA and draws its membership from representative of 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.

This EQIA and FSDA does, however, build on the EQIA and CRWIA entitled '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) teacher and lecturer estimates - 2020 results: EQIA' - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-national-qualifications-experience-2020/gov.scot). It also considers the advice of, and measures that have been put in place since the independent [Priestley review](#)² reported in October 2020.

In summary, this policy decision has been informed by the views of stakeholders, including young people, parents and teachers, alongside data on the spread of Covid-19 in our communities. The cancellation of the exams for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher in 2020-21 session and replacement by an approach based on teacher judgement of evidence of pupil attainment is considered the fairest way to ensure that learners' achievements are recognised in the current difficult circumstances.

Overall the evidence gathered and the analysis of that evidence for the EQIA and FSDA process did not identify any indirect or direct discrimination to learners with protected characteristics or socio-economic inequality through the policy intention or design to replace National Qualification exams in 2021 with an ACM.

2. Background

Approach in 2020

As part of the Scottish Government's initial response to the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020, the Deputy First Minister announced that all local authority schools in Scotland would close and that the National Qualifications exam diet (scheduled for Spring 2020) would be cancelled, in light of the public health risks presented by the pandemic.

There was no established process for delivering National 5, Highers and Advanced Higher qualification results, outside the normal assessment processes. The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) was asked by the Scottish Government to develop an alternative certification model to ensure that young people could receive awards that year. SQA developed a [certification model](#)³, which gathered teachers' and lecturers' estimates in the absence of any other information and involved moderation of these estimates across all centres to maintain standards.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-national-qualifications-experience-2020/gov.scot>

³ https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/SQAChiefExaminingOfficer2020NQReport.pdf

The estimates received by SQA in May showed a significant increase in attainment: at grades A-C by 10.4 percentage points for National 5s, by 14 percentage points for Highers, and by 13.4 percentage points for Advanced Highers compared to results in 2019. As a result of the SQA moderation process, around a quarter, or 134,000, of teacher and lecturer estimates of individual grades were adjusted, with just under 76,000 candidates having one or more of their grades lowered when compared to the teacher estimate.

Despite the headline improvements in the pass rate at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, and the fact that the pass rate amongst pupils in the most deprived areas increased by more than amongst those in the least deprived communities, the results left many young people feeling that their future had been determined by statistical modelling rather than their own capability and capacity.

In responding to those concerns the Deputy First Minister announced on 11 August 2020 that he was directing SQA to re-issue awards for those students who were downgraded, on the basis of original teacher or lecturer estimates. This policy change aimed to maintain faith in the Education system and give young people, from all backgrounds, the confidence that their hard work will be fairly rewarded.

The lessons learnt from 2020 have also informed decisions taken in respect of assessment and awarding in 2021. Equity and fairness have been key considerations throughout and this is examined below.

Return to schooling in August 2020

Following the return to full-time learning for all school pupils in August 2020, the Scottish Government, working alongside partners, continued to monitor the delivery of learning and teaching to ascertain whether there was disruption being experienced due to Covid-19 and how this impacted on learners.

This included monitoring **school absence figures** and continuous dialogue with key stakeholders (such as ADES, teacher representative bodies, parents and learners) to ascertain the feasibility of running the SQA exam diet in Spring 2021, with key checkpoints.

Simultaneously, the Scottish Government and partners across the education sector also contributed to the **independent review of the 2020 National Qualifications experience**, undertaken by Professor Mark Priestley⁴. This review was commissioned following the August 2020 results in an effort to capture lessons. The recommendations from the review have been considered in the context of this assessment.

SQA also conducted two **consultations**⁵ – one on potential adjustments to course assessment, and one on the timing of the exam diet.

These are considered more fully in Section 4: Methodology.

⁴ [independent review of the National Qualifications 2020 experience](#)

⁵ [Consultation outcomes - National Qualifications 2020-21 - SQA](#)

In October 2020 the Deputy First Minister announced that National 5 exams in 2021 would be cancelled and replaced with an alternative certification model. A further announcement was made at the start of December 2020 outlining that Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2021 would also be cancelled.

3. Scope of this Equality and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment

This document assesses the impact of cancelling exams for National 5, Highers and Advanced Highers in 2021, and replacing these with an alternative certification model (ACM). It assesses the impact on learners with protected characteristics and other groups of learners such as those who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

It is **not** an assessment of the impact of the ACM. This is being undertaken by SQA when co-designing the model with members of the National Qualifications 2021 Group, which comprises teacher and college representative bodies, ADES, SLS, Education Scotland, and others.

The change to the assessment and certification process predominately affects young people, in a school environment, but there are a small number of learners that will be affected out with the school environment, either in a college setting or through home schooling and private candidacy.

This impact assessment has been developed by a process of gathering, assessing and acting upon key equalities evidence. It assesses the impact of cancelling exams on learners with protected characteristics and in lower socio-economic demographics, to ensure that, as far as possible, learners in any of these groups would not be disadvantaged by the decision to cancel National Qualifications exams in 2021.

For example, SQA's consultation exercise looked at the detrimental effect of continuing with exams (under Covid-19 conditions) to learners with disabilities who may find the additional safety measures stressful. Likewise, their consultation exercise considered what the negative impacts might be on those learners with particular religions/beliefs if exams were to continue. Professor Priestley's review of the National Qualifications 2020 experience and the school attendance figures suggests that learners who fall ill from Covid-19, who are shielding/or in a shielding household, have a disability, are a minority ethnic group or are care experienced, may be positively impacted by the cancellation of exams and replacement with an ACM.

In developing this impact assessment, the Scottish Government has a duty to meet the three needs of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. The Scottish Government recognises while the measures may positively impact on one or more of the protected characteristics⁶, it also recognises that the introduction of the measures may have a disproportionate negative impact

⁶ Section 4 of the Equality Act 2010

on one or more of the protected characteristics. Where any negative impacts have been identified, we have sought to mitigate/eliminate these. We are also mindful that the equality duty is not just about negating or mitigating negative impacts, as we also have a positive duty to promote equality. We have sought to do this in making clear our expectations that any alternative to exams be based on evidence of learners' achievements, rather than an algorithm or a school's historical attainment data.

The Scottish Government is also required under the Fairer Scotland Duty to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions.

It must be recognised that the Scottish Government has been clear that an attainment gap does exist in Scottish education, and that significant steps and investment are being undertaken to reduce it. The disadvantage, discrimination and attainment gap that some learners may have already experience has been exacerbated by Covid-related restrictions, including decisions on qualifications and assessment. This has been at the centre of the Scottish Ministers' considerations, and is considered further in the sections below.

This document combines the Scottish Government's statutory duties to the following impact assessments:

Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

In line with the Equality Act 2010, the nine protected characteristics being considered are:

- Age
- Disability
- Sex
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy & maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage & civil partnership⁷

Given the importance of assessing the impact on each of the protected characteristics, the Scottish Government has considered the effect of these measures against the needs of the general equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not, and foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This has been considered where the evidence and data allows consideration of the potential impact on learners who share protected characteristics. The Scottish Government has also considered whether the measures could constitute direct and/or indirect discrimination (see Section 5 and 6).

⁷ Part 6 Chapter 1 Section 84 disapplies marriage and civil partnership (and age) to the provision of education.

Specifically, the EQIA part of this assessment considers impacts on equalities groups based on the three tests it is required to address:

- Does this policy eliminate discrimination for each of the nine protected characteristics? If not, is the discrimination justifiable? Can it be mitigated?
- Does this policy advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?
- Does this policy foster good community relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?

Education centres and authorities have a duty not to discriminate against learners with protected characteristics. This duty includes the way education is provided, access to a benefit, facility or service, and exclusion. They must not treat disabled learners less favourably and must take reasonable steps to avoid putting these learners at a substantial disadvantage.

Public sector organisations are also required to collaborate with each other to take actions necessary to uphold rights and safeguard wellbeing of looked after children, young people and care leavers, as set out in part 9 of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 (corporate parenting). This means public sector organisations must think carefully about their organisation's role and to listen to what looked after children and care leavers need so that no unnecessary disadvantages are experienced.

Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment (FSDA)

In line with the Equality Act (2010), and the Scottish Government's commitment to Fairer Scotland Duty Assessments since April 2018, this document will also consider how the policy may affect any inequalities of outcome for members of society experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

We have utilised the definition of 'socio-economic disadvantage' used in the Scottish Government's Fairer Scotland Duty Guidance⁸, meaning:

“Anyone living on a low income compared to others in Scotland, with little or no accumulated wealth, leading to greater material deprivation, restricting the ability to access basic goods and services...can be experienced in both places and communities of interest, leading to further negative outcomes such as social exclusion. ”

The key questions considered in Section 6 are:

- What will the potential policy impacts on inequalities of outcome associated with socio-economic disadvantage be?
- Are some communities of interest or place more affected by disadvantage than others, and how can these outcomes be mitigated against?
- How will this policy assist in reducing inequality in outcomes?

⁸ [Fairer Scotland Duty: interim guidance for public bodies - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2018/04/Fairer-Scotland-Duty-Interim-Guidance-for-Public-Bodies.pdf)

- What evidence exists to assess any socio-economic disadvantage and associated inequality?
- How do we include the voice of communities of interest/place in the policy considerations and decision making process?

The Scottish Government will keep all mitigating actions, and positive and negative impacts, under review. This impact assessment is a living document and as such we will also continue to consider and use any newly identified evidence, as it relates to each of the protected characteristics. We will make further adjustments, as appropriate, as we wish to ensure that equality and human rights are central to this process.

4. Methodology

In assessing the equalities and socio-economic impacts, a range of evidence has been considered to supplement understanding gained through both SQA and Scottish Government monitoring and engagement.

There is an existing evidence base on the use of teacher estimates, and this was considered in the context of this policy. This includes:

- A desk based review of evidence was compiled by SQA for the Equality Impact Assessment⁹ published on the use of teacher estimates of grades in August 2020 and highlights evidence from a range of sources including Ofqual Research and Analysis Literature Review and Rules of the Game (Wyness 2017). This also considered learners experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.
- Analyses of teacher estimates and attainment data using the Scottish Government pupil census¹⁰ and attainment data statistical analysis of the protected characteristics. This analysis covers learners across all publicly funded schools. No information on pupils at independent schools is held centrally.

In addition to evidence on the use of teacher estimates, consideration has also been given to the outcomes and recommendations of the **independent review of the National Qualifications 2020 experience, conducted by Professor Mark Priestley** and published in early October 2020.

The outcomes of **SQA's consultation exercises in August 2020** – one on potential adjustments to course assessment, and one on the timing of the exam diet – have also been considered.

The governance group overseeing Scotland's education recovery – the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG), chaired by the Deputy First Minister – considered these points on numerous occasions including during their early October

⁹ https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/2020-sqa-alternative-certification-model-equality-impact-assessment.pdf

¹⁰ Scottish Government pupil census data specification: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-exchange-of-data-school-pupil-census/>

and December 2020 meetings. A young person, nominated by the Scottish Youth Parliament, also joined this group in early November.

The Qualifications Contingency Group, which is usually convened should circumstances occur which have the potential to cause disruption to the qualifications system, discussed this matter at their meetings on 5 October 2020 and 4 December 2020.

Furthermore, the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) which pulls together stakeholders from across the education system to discuss curriculum and assessment policy, have discussed national qualifications and assessment, including the proposed ACM, on a number of occasions. So too have the Teacher Panel and BOSCH group in separate meetings with the Deputy First Minister and Scottish Government officials.

Information on the extent of interruption to the education of Higher and Advanced Higher candidates across local authorities was also gathered by Education Scotland at the end of November. And a session with college principals was facilitated by Colleges Scotland in early October.

The National Qualifications 2021 Group which is chaired by SQA and includes representatives from ADES, EIS, SLS, SCIS, Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland and the National Parent Forum Scotland (NPFS) has been meeting weekly since October to consider the alternative assessment approach for National Qualifications in lieu of the exams being cancelled.

In addition, the Scottish Government has continued to engage with young people, parents, teacher representative bodies and others since schools returned to full-time teaching in August and the subsequent return to remote learning after Christmas, in light of ongoing public health concerns. These include:

- Discussions with senior representatives from NPFS in September 2020 and consideration of their own survey (conducted in November 2020) to canvas parental views on whether to continue with the Higher and Advanced Higher exams.
- A private Ministerial panel discussions with Senior Phase pupils from Fife, Perth and Kinross, and Highlands and Islands in early October and early December 2020.

All of these discussions have helped inform this Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment. The Scottish Government continues to discuss these matters with young people, parents/carers and teachers via CERG, National Qualifications 2021 and other formal and informal forums described above.

5. Evidence and Key Findings

This section sets out the evidence the Scottish Government has considered in the development of this policy. Key findings from this evidence are noted:

It includes:

- The Scottish Government's EQIA on ¹¹Teacher and Lecturer Estimates in 2020.
- Professor Priestley's independent review of national qualifications experience 2020.
- SQA consultation exercises 2020.
- School attendance figures.
- Stakeholder views (including the views of the teaching profession, young people, and parents).

The evidence compiled in respect of the Scottish Government's EQIA on Teacher and Lecturer Estimates in 2020 using teacher and lecturer grade estimates has been reconsidered, and the conclusions noted.

The Scottish Government has analysed the available data and evidence on the impact for young people who share protected characteristics, where this has been available.

5.1 Professor Priestley independent review of qualifications experience

Evidence

This review, which reported in early October, drew on a range of evidence, including stakeholder testimony (generated in panel and individual interviews) and analysis of relevant documentation. Young people, parents/carers, teachers, senior school leaders, local authorities, SQA and government officials were involved in the panel discussions. The report sets out who was engaged but for the purposes of this assessment, representatives from Children in Scotland, Scottish Youth Parliament, Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland, SQA: Where's our say?, were amongst those engaged in panel discussions.

All the recommendations have been carefully considered to mitigate against any adverse impacts of any policy decisions on the approach to be taken in 2021. The report contained 9 recommendations, of which two are of particular relevance:

1. Recommendation 1 - Suspension of the National 5 examinations diet in 2021, with qualifications awarded on the basis of centre estimation based upon validated assessments.
2. Recommendation 2 - The development of a nationally recognised, fully transparent and proportionate system for moderation of centre-based assessment.

¹¹ [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) teacher and lecturer estimates - 2020 results: EQIA - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/collections/documents/eqia-2020-teacher-lecturer-estimates-2020-results/)

Key Findings

This independent review of the 2020 experience identified a number of factors related to equity and wellbeing which are pertinent when considering any policy decisions that will impact on assessment and certification in 2021:

- The extent to which young people reported that extended periods of illness or extenuating circumstances were not considered.
- The extent to which estimates of learner grades varied and were moderated (i.e. changed), especially between different subjects, year groups or individuals.
- The equity implications of an over-reliance on statistical approaches which are based on historical cohort data.
- The impact of poverty, especially lack of access to digital technology and/or Wi-Fi, on young people's ability to complete work digitally.
- The negative impact of young people's health and wellbeing, particularly those with additional support needs.

In respect of Recommendation 1 of the Priestley Review – Suspension of the National 5 exams in 2021 – this was based on panel discussions statements that schools lacked the capacity, in an already disrupted school year, to prepare learners for exams and develop robust evidence for centre estimates of grades. The report cites it is based on the following rationale:

- National 5 is not a leaving qualification for the majority of candidates^[24], and therefore less high-stakes for most.
- National 5 involves large numbers of candidates – cancelling the examinations diet would enable considerable space to be freed for the arguably more important Higher and Advanced Higher examinations (both of which involve smaller numbers of students, and can be dispersed more readily across school building).
- The cohorts currently entering school year S3 and S4 have already experienced considerable disruption to teaching time; cancelling the National 5 examinations would allow for additional teaching time in the summer of 2021 for both cohorts.

The Priestley Review identified groups of learners who may have been disproportionately affected by the results process in session 19/20. These groups include learners who experienced extended periods of illness, experienced extenuating circumstances such as bereavement, learners who were care experienced and learners with little or no access to IT (including broadband connections). It is not possible to identify whether the learners consulted shared any protected characteristics. However, there would be a likely link between these groups and the ability to fully prepare for National Qualifications in session 2020/21. Removal of examinations and the reduction in course content would reduce the inequity faced by these groups by providing greater opportunity for learning.

The groups of learners more disproportionately affected by the results processes in session 19/20 overlap those who may be more affected by Covid-19. Learners who fall ill from Covid-19, or are forced to shield due to family members or those

they have been in close contact with Covid-19, are more likely to come from areas of deprivation. Likewise pupils from more deprived deciles may lack the technology required to fully engage in learning.

We also know that people with disabilities and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by Covid-19, which would suggest that school children of these protected characteristics would also feel the effect.

We are not aware of any other evidence from the Priestley Review that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

The Priestley Review's findings and recommendations were considered and discussed by the stakeholders listed in section 4 above, and have informed policy decisions made by the Scottish Government in respect of the approach to be taken for 2021, and in particular led to the decision around the cancellation of National 5 exams.

5.2 SQA Consultation exercise

Evidence

At the start of the 2020-21 term, SQA undertook two consultation exercises¹². The first was a technical consultation on proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments. Practitioners (teachers and lecturers) were the priority group for this consultation but to ensure transparency it was open to the public. It should be noted that it is not possible to breakdown the socio-economic backgrounds of consultees, or whether the respondents shared any protected characteristics. These were broadly recorded as teachers/practitioners, parents/carers, learners or 'other'. As part of their consultation, they also invited comments on issues of equality and accessibility (see Annex D).

Around 22,000 people accessed the SQA consultation on modifications to course assessments; and just under 17,000 individual responses were received (60% from practitioners; 22% from candidates and 16% from parents and carers). The proposals that were strongly supported in the consultation document included one or more of the following: the removal of coursework or some elements of exam papers; shortened exam papers; or removal of practical assessments for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

SQA's EQIA considered the potential impact of course assessment changes on candidates who share protected characteristics along with how any potential negative impacts identified could be mitigated. In addition, other groups of learners, such as those who are socio-economically disadvantaged on the basis of Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), or who experience other circumstances that present barriers to accessing qualifications, were considered. The SQA's CRWIA¹³ set out to assess the

¹² [Consultation outcomes - National Qualifications 2020-21 - SQA](#)

¹³ [Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment - Proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments for session 2020–21 \(sqa.org.uk\)](#)

impact of the proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments for session 2020–21 on young people.

The SQA consultation on the timetable for the exam diet was a private consultation with its Timetable Advisory Group, Appointees/Markers, Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament and the Children and Young Peoples' Commissioner. Around 7,000 people were consulted, with 1,000 responses received. It examined options to make changes to the exam timetable to allow more time to teaching and learning lost in the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. The options were to delay the existing timetable by 3 weeks or to change the order of the exams (having N5 exams first followed by Highers and Advanced Highers).

Key Findings

SQA consultation exercise into potential modifications for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses found there was broad support (over 65.6%) for making changes to course assessment in light of continued Covid-related disruption; increasing opportunities for learning and teaching (56.8%); more flexible approaches to assessment for learners (67.1%)

Their consultation also included questions on equalities and the potential impact of any changes and mitigating actions. See Annex E. SQA have reported that the responses received to their consultation focussed on **general issues** of equity rather than protected characteristics. For example, learners may face difficulties accessing ICT (including issues relating to the digital divide and correlation with more deprived areas); the disparity between what support learners of different backgrounds may get from home (e.g. those from more deprived areas perhaps accessing less support from parents/carers); differential access to blended learning experiences; learners with ASN or those with underlying health issues who will need to stringently social distance could be disadvantaged by exams.

SQA's EQIA¹⁴ have considered the potential impacts to learners of: the removal of question paper (i.e. the exam); changes to question papers; removal of and/or modification of coursework. They have undertaken this exercise for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This includes consideration of the impact of these changes to all protected characteristics groups. SQA's work examined the effect that continuing with exams would pose to protected characteristics groupings. For example:

- Disability – learners who have difficulty concentrating for extended period and maintaining focus may find exams under stringent social distancing measures stressful and have difficulties demonstrating their attainment.
- Religion and belief – Ramadan is due to fall during the exam diet 2021 and those fasting because of religious beliefs may experience a higher level of fatigue.

¹⁴ ¹⁴ [Equality Impact Assessment - proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments for session 2020–21 \(sqa.org.uk\)](https://www.sqa.org.uk/equality-impact-assessment-proposed-modifications-national-5-higher-advanced-higher-course-assessments-session-2020-21)

- Pregnancy and maternity and gender re-assignment – learners who are due to give birth during the exam period be adversely affected by the reliance on an exam, and their ability to prepare for it.

SQA are continuing to provide guidance, arrangements and services to mitigate negative impacts of the ACM.

The replacement of exams with the ACM intends to impact positively on all groups of learners, including those with protected characteristics. The quality assurance processes to be put in place will help teachers to make fair, accurate and consistent judgements about learner awards. Resources and guidance will be provided by SQA to support this, including guidance on the fair and equitable treatment of all learners, information on bias, and advice on assessment arrangements for learners who have additional support needs or a disability. The model will have flexibility, fairness and equity at the forefront, acknowledging the potentially lengthy or detrimental impacts of disruption to learning, particular for learners with a disability, suffering from illness, poverty and deprivation, being a carer or care experienced. Flexibility in gathering evidence will support learners with protected characteristics (e.g. pregnancy/maternity, mental health needs) who may have normally found exams problematic. Furthermore, SQA are committed to working with the schools/colleges to consider individual requests for reasonable adjustments.

SQA have now concluded their consultation exercise on their appeals process for 2021.

5.3 School attendance figures

Evidence

Scottish Government has monitored school absence levels since schools returned in August 2020. Data is published [here](#).

This data allows consideration of, amongst other factors, time series data showing how attendance rates vary over time and by stage, SIMD and Local Authority. Annex A and B contains fuller versions of the tables used below.

The data (see table “Percentage of openings showing pupils were not in school because of any Covid-19 related reason”) shows that since early October, the prevalence of Covid-19 amongst secondary school aged learners has generally worsened. Specifically, whilst attendance levels were initially above 90% for the first few weeks of session 2020/2021, the attendance levels of Senior Phase pupils since September have been more variable and lower.

Attendance and Covid-related absences by stage on last Monday of each month:

Date	Overall attendance rate			Covid-related absence rate		
	28 Sept	26 Oct	30 Nov	28 Sept	26 Oct	30 Nov
Secondary schools	90.9%	90.3%	87.1%	1.4%	2.9%	4.1%
S4	89%	88.9%	85.6%	1.6%	2.9%	4.2%
S5	90.6%	89.2%	87.5%	1.4%	3.6%	3.4%
S6	91.5%	90.2%	88.1%	1.5%	3.5%	3.7%

Absence rates vary within SIMD quartiles. Whilst it is ordinarily the case that pupils from more deprived areas have lower attendance rates, Covid-19 absences have added a further dimension. The table below shows the percentage of times in which pupils had at least 90% attendance, organised by stage and showing attendance rates of SIMD Q1 and Q5 (full data in Annex C).

Covid-related absences by SIMD and stage from 17 August to 8 December:

Stage	Stage	Percentage of time pupils were in at least 90% attendance	
All Secondary	62.6%		
		Most deprived 20%	Least deprived 20%
S4	All S4 - 61.9%	52%	67.3%
S5	All S5 - 62.6%	55.5%	67.3%
S6	All S6 - 63.1%	53.9%	68.2%

Absence rates also vary across Scotland and across Local Authorities. Within the data tableau, a Local Authority map - "CYP Attendance LA Map" – is available and shows this variability in attendance rates, and Covid-19 related absences across Local Authorities. For example on 10 November 2020 8% of total school absences within West Dunbartonshire were Covid-19 related, compared with 0.2% of absences on the same day within Na h-Eileanan Siar.

When considering protected characteristics (Annex C), it is noted that whilst attendance rates across Ethnic Background do vary across ethnic categories, they do not show any distinct pattern. For example, whilst pupils from an Asian background tended to have an absence rate "due to any Covid-19 related reason" than was greater than the "all backgrounds" figure, pupils from an African/Black/Caribbean background tended to be below "all backgrounds" average.

Key Findings

The Scottish Government's online dashboard ¹⁵contains and presents school attendance and absence information. Attendance and absence figures by

¹⁵ COVID19-SchoolsandChildcareInformation - SG Education Analytical Services: Learning Analysis | Tableau Public

stage (i.e. school year group) by SIMD, by Local Authority and by Ethnic Background have been analysed (Annex A to C).

This data shows the following for Senior Phase pupils:

- The attendance rate continued to decline through August to November.
- The percentage of pupil absences due to Covid-19 rises through the year.
- That the overall absence rate in the most deprived areas is greater than that of young people in the least deprived areas.
- That there is variation in Covid-19 related absences across Local Authorities
- There is variation in Covid-19 related absences across Ethnic Background

National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses have a very clear structure based around a time allocation for each course. National 5 and Higher courses are allocated 240 hours of study, Advanced Higher are allocated 320 hours. Included in these time allocations is time for assessment and/or examination preparation.

The variability in attendance rates across Local Authorities, across deprivation deciles and ethnic backgrounds, will mean that across Scotland there would be an inequity in the time available to learners to successfully complete courses. By removing examinations, some course content and amending assessment requirements, sufficient time should now be available for the completion of course, even by those most affected by reduced attendance. This could have a positive impact on some learners who are either shielding or in a shielding household, who would not be able to physical attend an exam.

We are not aware of any other specific evidence from this data that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

5.4 Stakeholder dialogue

Evidence

There has been ongoing discussion with key stakeholders including but not limited to young people, parents and teachers since August 2020 to gauge opinions on learning and teaching experience for all learners, and assessment approaches for 2021, in light of ongoing public health concerns.

This includes dedicated sessions with key stakeholder groupings prior to the policy decision to replace National 5 exams with an alternative certification model in October, and the decision that then followed in respect of Higher and Advanced Highers in December 2020.

To summarise, the stakeholders engaged include:

- CERG
- QCG

- CAB
- Local authorities (via Education Scotland)
- College principals
- National Qualifications 2021 Group
- Young people
- Parents/carers

The views of each stakeholder grouping are outlined in Section 6 below.

Key Findings

- **Practitioners**

The proposal to postpone National 5 exams was reflected in the **BOSCH position paper** submitted in response to SQA's consultation exercise. This, alongside the views expressed by EIS and other teacher representative bodies, have expressed that the differing and often significant impact of Covid-19 on many young people, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds, mean that an exam diet in 2021 would not be in the best interest of young people and potentially unfair to those who have faced greater disruption.

We are not aware of any evidence from the Bosch Position Paper that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

The anecdotal data from local authorities (via Education Scotland) reported that staff and pupil absences were having a variable impact on their ability to deliver Higher and Advanced Higher courses. They also reported equity-related concerns about a potential disproportionate impact on particular groups of learners, including those living in poverty.

The EIS welcomed the decision to cancel N5 exams and prioritise Higher exams. However, during the National Qualifications 2021 (NQ21) Group meeting on 13 November 2020 where contingency planning in relation to Higher and Advanced Higher exams was considered, the EIS made the case for cancelling these exams and for doing so as soon as possible. The following reasons were cited by the EIS for a full cancellation of the 2021 exam diet before February:

- the growing confidence that exists in relation to delivering an alternative assessment model for National 5s.
- the additional teaching time (c.4-8 weeks) that could be made available for Higher and Advanced Higher pupils and students, though that would largely be after the estimation and awarding processes are complete.
- the limited time available to teachers and lecturers to gather alternative evidence should a decision to cancel Higher and Advanced Higher exams be made at the February break.

- the significant logistical issues that exist in relation to delivering exams for Higher classes which in some cases are only marginally smaller than National 5 classes.

We are not aware of any further evidence from the teaching profession that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

- **Colleges and Universities**

Dialogue took place with Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland who confirmed their understanding of the challenges and confirmed their willingness to adapt and work with the Scottish Government and others on the outcome of any policy change in relation to holding exams in 2021.

We are not aware of any evidence from the FE/HE sector that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

- **Young people**

As detailed above, the Ministerial led panel discussions with **young people** illustrated the breadth of views on whether or not the exam diet for 2021 should proceed as normal. These young people represented different geographic areas and socio-economic backgrounds, and had a range of experiences of qualifications and assessment across the Senior Phase of school.

In these discussions, there were mixed opinions on the need for exams to go ahead, particularly those “higher stake” exams (e.g. Higher and Advanced Higher) given their importance in securing further or higher education places and concerns regarding the perceived value of a qualification based solely on continuous assessment. However, there was a high degree of anxiety being reported by young people in respect of the current proposals and the impact on those learners with additional support needs or with protected characteristics or from certain socio-economic backgrounds, but also on the loss of learning and teaching for those affected by Covid-19.

Extra evidence via the “lockdown lowdown” reports from Young Scot, Youthlink and the Scottish Youth Parliament were also considered. These were undertaken at key points throughout 2020 to gauge young people’s views on the impact of Covid-19 on their lives, including but not limited to their educational experiences. Their reports broke down their data according to rural/urban experiences, SIMD, age, gender, and ethnicity.

Their first report ¹⁶(published in May 2020) found that 49% of their respondents were moderately or extremely concerned about exams and coursework. It also showed that respondents in areas of higher deprivation

¹⁶ [LockdownLowdown+Results+by+Demographic+Breakdown.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

were more concerned about this issue than those in lower Quintiles. High levels of concern over exams or coursework were reported amongst learners who identified themselves as Asian/Asian British or Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

Their second report¹⁷ published in November 2020 focussed on the concerns of young people as lockdown restrictions changed. It also ran alongside focus groups help by the Scottish Youth Parliament with young people whose voices are seldom heard¹⁸. A pressing concern from respondents was around the impact of Covid-19 on their exams and calls for clarity on whether or not they would go ahead; anxiety amongst those whose exams had already been cancelled (National 5 candidates) and on the place of exams more generally. It is not possible to extrapolate the concern amongst learners with particular protected characteristics.

- **Race/religion**

The report on the voices of seldom heard groups considered the views of young people from black, Asian and minority ethnic communities; disabilities and additional support needs; care experience; experience of the criminal justice system; and young carers. As above it touched on a multitude of issues, including education. Specific questions were posed in relation to the impact of not sitting exams. The report summarises that the (qualitative) responses expressed little concern with not having exams.

- **Parents/carers**

NPFS¹⁹ carried out a survey in early October which showed 58% of parents being opposed to a full cancellation of exams; 74% being in favour of an approach that saw Higher and Advanced Higher exams being prioritised; and 70% agreeing that work should continue towards the exams as normal but that exams should be cancelled later in the academic year if the public health situation worsens.

A further NPFS survey was carried out in November 2020 to gather the views of parents and carers of pupils sitting Higher and Advanced Highers to better understand how Covid-19 has impacted on their learning and preparations for exams in 2021.

The November survey had responses from 4,196 parents from across all local authority areas in Scotland. There were notably higher participation levels across the central belt local authorities and particularly from those currently in Covid-19 local protection level 4 (the highest proportion of responses were from South Lanarkshire - 11.3% of respondents, South Ayrshire - 10.8%, North Lanarkshire – 9.1% and Glasgow – 7.7%). Key pertinent points were:

¹⁷ [Dec2020-LockdownLowdown-V2-Survey-Final.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#)

¹⁸ [Dec2020-LockdownLowdown-Voice-Seldom-Heard-Groups-COVID19-Pandemic-Updated-December-2020.pdf \(syp.org.uk\)](#)

¹⁹ [News – National Parent Forum of Scotland \(npfs.org.uk\)](#)

- Almost all respondents (98%) felt that their child's learning in the Senior Phase had been disrupted at least a little due to Covid-19 with almost three-quarters (74%) indicating it had been disrupted either a great deal or a lot.
- Responses on the level of support received during lockdown or when self-isolating, varied. Around 21% said they had received either 'a great deal/a lot' of support, compared with 43% saying the support was 'moderate' and 35% rating it as 'little/none at all'.
- Over half (around 57%) of respondents were either 'a little/not at all' confident that their child would have an equal chance of attaining the grades they deserve by sitting their Higher/Advanced Higher exams as normal in 2021; compared with around 15% who had either a 'great/a lot of' confidence.
- Half (51%) of respondents favoured cancellation of 2021 Exam Diet due to their regions current health situation, with the remaining respondents either undecided (23%) or content for it to proceed (26%).
- A clear consensus emerged on the timing of any potential announcement regarding the 2021 exam diet, with over 75% stating this should happen before Christmas, compared with 22% who favoured an announcement before the February 2021 half term break.
- Just over half (55%) of respondents had either a great deal or a lot of confidence in teacher judgement being used in the absence of an exam.

We are not aware of any further evidence from parents or carers that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

- **Governance groups**

The views of stakeholders were shared with and discussed with the CERG, QCG and CAB.

We are not aware of any evidence from these discussions with stakeholders that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on any of the protected characteristics.

6. Impact(s) across protected characteristics

The summary below collates findings across each protected characteristic listed:

Senior Phase Learners

Age

The Priestley Review identified groups of learners who may have been disproportionately affected by the results process in session 19/20. These groups include learners who experienced extended periods of illness, experienced extenuating circumstances such as bereavement, learners who were care experienced and learners with little or no access to IT (including broadband connections). It is not possible to identify whether the learners consulted shared any protected characteristics. However, there would be a likely link between these groups and the ability to fully prepare for National Qualifications in session 2020/21. Removal of examinations and the reduction in course content would reduce the inequity faced by these groups by providing greater opportunity for learning.

Views expressed by EIS and other teacher representative bodies, have expressed that the differing and often significant impact of Covid-19 on many young people, particularly those from less advantaged backgrounds, mean that an exam diet in 2021 would not be in the best interest of young people and potentially unfair to those who have faced greater disruption.

Anecdotal data from local authorities (via Education Scotland) reported that staff and pupil absences were having a variable impact on their ability to deliver Higher and Advanced Higher courses. They also reported equity-related concerns about a potential disproportionate impact on particular groups of learners, including those living in poverty.

Extra evidence via the “lockdown lowdown” reports from Young Scot, Youthlink and the Scottish Youth Parliament were also considered. These were undertaken at key points throughout 2020 to gauge young people’s views on the impact of Covid-19 on their lives, including but not limited to their educational experiences. Their reports broke down their data according to rural/urban experiences, SIMD, **age**, gender, and ethnicity. This data did not provide evidence that this decision would have a disproportionate impact on the basis of age.

There is no further evidence available at this time to suggest that this decision will have a disproportionate impact on the basis of age. Therefore, it is not possible to identify whether there will be a positive, negative or neutral effect on the three needs of the PSED.

Disability

As per the Priestley Review, the groups of learners more disproportionately affected by the results processes in session 19/20 overlap those who may be more affected by Covid-19. Learners who fall ill from Covid-19, or are forced to shield due to family

members or those they have been in close contact with Covid-19, are more likely to come from areas of deprivation. Likewise pupils from more deprived deciles may lack the technology required to fully engage in learning.

We also know that people with **disabilities** and minority ethnic groups are disproportionately affected by Covid-19, which would suggest that school children of these protected characteristics would also feel the effect.

SQA have reported that the responses received to their consultation focussed on **general issues** of equity rather than protected characteristics. For example, learners may face difficulties accessing ICT (including issues relating to the digital divide and correlation with more deprived areas); the disparity between what support learners of different backgrounds may get from home (e.g. those from more deprived areas perhaps accessing less support from parents/carers); differential access to blended learning experiences; **learners with ASN or those with underlying health issues** who will need to stringently social distance could be disadvantaged by exams.

SQA's EQIA have considered the potential impacts to learners of: the removal of question paper (i.e. the exam); changes to question papers; removal of and/or modification of coursework. They have undertaken this exercise for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This includes consideration of the impact of these changes to all protected characteristics groups. SQA's work examined the effect that continuing with exams would pose to protected characteristics groupings. For example: **Disability** – learners who have difficulty concentrating for extended period and maintaining focus may find exams under stringent social distancing measures stressful and have difficulties demonstrating their attainment.

Therefore, we envisage this policy will have a positive effect by eliminating discrimination, advancing equality for these learners and fostering good relations, as these learners will not experience the perceived pressure of exams.

Within the Ministerial led panel discussions with **young people** there was a high degree of anxiety being reported by young people in respect of the current proposals and the impact on those learners with additional support needs or with protected characteristics or from certain socio-economic backgrounds, but also on the loss of learning and teaching for those affected by Covid-19.

Sex

Extra evidence via the "lockdown lowdown" reports from Young Scot, Youthlink and the Scottish Youth Parliament were also considered. These were undertaken at key points throughout 2020 to gauge young people's views on the impact of Covid-19 on their lives, including but not limited to their educational experiences. Their reports broke down their data according to rural/urban experiences, SIMD, age, **gender**, and ethnicity.

This data did not provide evidence that this decision would have a disproportionate impact on the basis of gender.

There is no further evidence available at this time to suggest that this decision will have a disproportionate impact on the basis of gender. Therefore, it is not possible to identify whether there will be a positive, negative or neutral effect on the three needs of the PSED.

Gender reassignment

SQA's EQIA have considered the potential impacts to learners of: the removal of question paper (i.e. the exam); changes to question papers; removal of and/or modification of coursework. They have undertaken this exercise for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This includes consideration of the impact of these changes to all protected characteristics groups. SQA's work examined the effect that continuing with exams would pose to protected characteristics groupings.

This data did not provide evidence that this decision would have a disproportionate impact on the basis of gender reassignment, nor is there any further evidence available at this time to demonstrate this. Therefore it is not possible to identify whether there will be a positive, negative or neutral effect on the three needs of the PSED.

Sexual Orientation

We are not aware of any specific evidence from data that indicates whether the cancellation of exams could impact positively or negatively on this protected characteristic.

Race

As per the Priestley Review, the groups of learners more disproportionately affected by the results processes in session 19/20 overlap those who may be more affected by Covid-19. Learners who fall ill from Covid-19, or are forced to shield due to family members or those they have been in close contact with Covid-19, are more likely to come from areas of deprivation. Likewise pupils from more deprived deciles may lack the technology required to fully engage in learning.

We also know that people with disabilities and **minority ethnic groups** are disproportionately affected by Covid-19, which would suggest that school children of these protected characteristics would also feel the effect.

When considering attendance rates across protected characteristics (Annex D), it is noted that whilst attendance rates across Ethnic Background do vary across ethnic categories, they do not show any distinct pattern. For example, whilst pupils from an Asian background tended to have an absence rate "due to any Covid-19 related reason" that was greater than the "all backgrounds" figure, pupils from an African/Black/Caribbean background tended to be below "all backgrounds" average.

Extra evidence via the "lockdown lowdown" reports from Young Scot, Youthlink and the Scottish Youth Parliament were also considered. These were undertaken at key points throughout 2020 to gauge young people's views on the impact of Covid-19 on their lives, including but not limited to their educational experiences. Their reports

broke down their data according to rural/urban experiences, SIMD, age, gender, and **ethnicity**.

Their first report (published in May 2020) found that 49% of their respondents were moderately or extremely concerned about exams and coursework. It also showed that respondents in areas of higher deprivation were more concerned about this issue than those in lower Quintiles. High levels of concern over exams or coursework were reported amongst learners who identified themselves as Asian/Asian British or Black, African, Caribbean or Black British.

This suggests the decision to cancel exams could have a positive or negative impact on these learners, depending on their learning preferences. In turn, it is not possible to identify whether there will be a positive, negative or neutral effect on the three needs of the PSED.

Pregnancy and Maternity

SQA's EQIA have considered the potential impacts to learners of: the removal of question paper (i.e. the exam); changes to question papers; removal of and/or modification of coursework. They have undertaken this exercise for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This includes consideration of the impact of these changes to all protected characteristics groups. SQA's work examined the effect that continuing with exams would pose to protected characteristics groupings. For example: **Pregnancy and maternity** and gender re-assignment – learners who are due to give birth during the exam period be adversely affected by the reliance on an exam, and their ability to prepare for it.

This data suggests that this decision could have a positive impact on the basis of pregnancy and maternity, and will eliminate discrimination, advance equality for these learners and fostering good relations.

Religion or Belief

SQA's EQIA have considered the potential impacts to learners of: the removal of question paper (i.e. the exam); changes to question papers; removal of and/or modification of coursework. They have undertaken this exercise for each course at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. This includes consideration of the impact of these changes to all protected characteristics groups. SQA's work examined the effect that continuing with exams would pose to protected characteristics groupings. For example: **Religion and belief** – Ramadan is due to fall during the exam diet 2021 and those fasting because of religious beliefs may experience a higher level of fatigue.

Therefore this may have a positive effect on these learners, and help to advance equality of opportunity, as it will mitigate the fatigue experienced by learners who are fasting.

7. Conclusion

This document has set out an overview of the range of impacts which the decision to replace National Qualifications exams in 2021 with an alternative certification model, will have on learners. It has also illustrated the extent of the differential impact of Covid-19 on individual learners and schools at the start of the 2020-21 academic year, alongside the breadth of stakeholder views on this matter.

It has been noted in Sections 4 and 5 that a range of views exist amongst stakeholders including but not limited to teachers, young people, and parents/carers. Some views expressed are supportive of the policy decision (to cancel exams and replace with an alternative model) and others are not.

Key concerns regarding equity and fairness:

- Attendance rates – this document has shown evidence that there exists variability in Covid-19 related absence rates across SIMD and Local Authority. This variability of lost learning time raises an issue of fairness for learners. While exams can be modified to address generic learning loss, it is not possible for them to be adjusted to address differential loss. Feedback from practitioners suggested that an alternative approach to awarding qualifications based on teacher judgement is likely to better account for differential loss of learning.
- Quality of learner(s) experience when absent - The feedback received from practitioners, either directly to the Scottish Government or via groups such as the CERG, QCG, CAB and National Qualifications 2021 groups did, however, highlights there is no consistent approach to the level of support learners receive when not in school or college whilst self-isolating or during remote learning. Therefore the impact on learning time will vary by individual occurrences of illness, self-isolation or experience of remote learning, and by which school or college the learner attends. There is a broad guide to the amount of teaching time and study required to complete different National Qualification courses, however, as each learner's ability and approach to each course may differ, there is no robust way to estimate the impact of net lost learning time on potential performance in a standardised way.

Overall, the majority view of stakeholders was that given the impact of disrupted learning for some learners, particularly those in areas of greater deprivation, of Covid-19 and the likely physical disruption to holding an exam diet, that cancelling the exam diet and replacing with an ACM was a fairer, more equitable, approach. By providing increased time to complete courses, by the removal of course content, the reduction in assessment and in freeing up the time used for examination preparation, the decision to cancel examinations allows those learners who may have experienced more disruption in their learning to continue to work towards successful course outcomes.

Stakeholders views indicate that the decision to cancel exams has a positive effect in terms of eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity by the introduction of a fairer, more equitable approach and it may also foster good relations by raising awareness of people's diverse needs.

In addition to the analysis set out in this document, the Scottish Government continues to engage and listen to the views of learners and other education stakeholders via its governance structures – the CERG, Qualifications Contingency Group and CAB. This will include continued consideration of how the ACM can advance equality of opportunity, alongside eliminating or mitigating against any discrimination in relation to protected characteristics. It has also helped improve our understanding of the needs of people with certain protected characteristics.

The National Qualifications 2021 Group, chaired by SQA and with representatives from teacher and college bodies, ADES, SLS, Education Scotland, young people via the Scottish Youth Parliament, parents and other key stakeholders is meeting regularly to advance work on the ACM for 2021, and to ensure this is communicated clearly and effectively. The members of this group represent their individual bodies and the range of experiences and views held. SQA have also established their own Learner Panel to inform this work and future activities.

SQA have produced an EQIA²⁰ and CRWIA²¹ on the ACM which includes consideration of socio-economic disadvantage. These will continue to be developed as SQA progress work on the appeals process for 2021.

The Scottish Government will keep all mitigating actions, and positive and negative impacts, under review. This impact assessment is a living document and as such we will also continue to consider and use any newly identified evidence, as it relates to each of the protected characteristics. We will make further adjustments, as appropriate, as we wish to ensure that equality and human rights are central to this process.

²⁰ [Equality Impact Assessment - National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Alternative Certification Model 2021 \(sqa.org.uk\)](#)

²¹ [acm-2021-crw-impact-assessment.pdf \(sqa.org.uk\)](#)

Annex A

Attendance Evidence for EQIA

Percentage Attendance of Senior Phase pupils over time (figure quoted is attendance on the Monday of the w/b indicated)

	17/8	24/8	31/8	7/9	14/9	21/9	28/9	5/10	12/10	19/10	26/10	2/11	9/11	16/11	23/11	30/11	7/12	14/12
All Secondary	95%	90.4%	84.1%	87.6%	90.6%	90.9%	90.9%	89.3%	89%	88.4%	90.3%	87.9%	86.9%	85.9%	86.7%	87.1%	86.8%	84.1%
S4	94%	89.3%	82.8%	85.4%	88.5%	89.1%	89%	88.1%	86.7%	86%	88.9%	85.8%	84.7%	84.2%	85.5%	85.6%	85.8%	83.3%
S5	94.3%	90/7%	85.5%	87.1%	90.3%	90.5%	90.6%	89.3%	87.6%	87.7%	89.2%	86.6%	85.8%	85%	86.7%	87.5%	86.8%	84.5%
S6	94.2%	92%	87.7%	89.1%	91.2%	91.5%	91.5%	90.7%	89.3%	88.8%	90.2%	87.7%	88.1%	87.5%	88.3%	88.1%	88.2%	85.7%

Main takeaways:

- This included “all reason” absences
- S4 consistently lower attendance rate than school average and S5/6
- S5 and S6 almost always lower attendance rate until mid-November (what happened? Increased mitigations in class (masks))

Percentage of openings showing pupils were not in school because of any Covid-19 related reason

	17/8	24/8	31/8	7/9	14/9	21/9	28/9	5/10	12/10	19/10	26/10	2/11	9/11	16/11	23/11	30/11	7/12	14/12
All Secondary	0.8%	1.9%	2.3%	1.8%	1.5%	1.6%	1.4%	2.6%	2.9%	3.4%	2.9%	3.9%	5%	5.6%	5%	4.1%	4.4%	5.7%
S4	0.9%	2%	2.5%	2.1%	1.8%	1.8%	1.6%	2.9%	3.6%	4.1%	2.9%	4.3%	5.7%	5.8%	4.9%	4.2%	4.1%	5%
S5	0.8%	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	1.4%	1.6%	1.4%	2.6%	4.3%	3.7%	3.6%	4.7%	6%	6.3%	4.9%	3.4%	4%	5.1%
S6	0.8%	1.2%	1.6%	1.3%	1.3%	1.8%	1.5%	2.4%	4.6%	3.9%	3.5%	4.8%	4.6%	5.0%	4.3%	3.7%	3.8%	4.9%

Main takeaways:

- S4 greater Covid-related absence rate than school average and S5/6
- S5 and S6 almost always greater Covid-related absence rate until mid-November (what happened? Increased mitigations in class (masks))

Annex C

Percentage of time pupils were in attendance (showing all secondary and S4/5/6 rates) – 17 August to 8 December

Stage	Quintile	Percentage of time pupils who had at least 90% attendance
All Secondary		62.6%
All S4		61.9%
All S5		62.6%
All S6		63.1%
S4	1	52%
	2	59.4%
	3	66%
	4	65.8%
	5	67.3%
S5	1	55.5%
	2	59.4%
	3	66.1%
	4	66.3%
	5	67.3%
S6	1	53.9%
	2	60.2%
	3	64.3%
	4	66.7%
	5	68.2%

Main takeaways:

- With only one exception (S4 between deciles 3 and 4) across each stage S4->6, and across quintiles, attendance rises steadily from SIMD Q1 to SIMD Q5
- As above S4 rates consistently lower than S5 and S6

Annex D – Attendance rates across Ethnic Background (Percentage Attendance)

	17/8	24/8	31/8	7/9	14/9	21/9	28/9	5/10	12/10	19/10	26/10	2/11	9/11	16/11	23/11	30/11	7/12	14/12
White Scottish	95.9%	89.3%	86.5%	90.7%	92.7%	92.8%	92.8%	91.6%	91.0%	90.3%	92.6%	90.4%	89.8%	89.1%	89.3%	89.7%	89.7%	88.1%
White Other	93.3%	87.4%	85.5%	90.4%	92.5%	92.4%	92.8%	91.8%	92.2%	89.6%	92.2%	91.1%	90.7%	90.1%	90.4%	90.5%	90.3%	89.3%
Asian	94.6%	85.8%	84.9%	91.1%	93.0%	93.3%	93.5%	92.0%	90.8%	90.3%	91.1%	89.9%	89.0%	88.2%	89.5%	89.9%	89.6%	88.9%
African/Black/Caribbean	95.8%	90.6%	89.4%	94.1%	95.2%	94.8%	95.2%	93.8%	93.2%	92.8%	94.5%	92.3%	91.6%	90.6%	91.9%	92.7%	92.3%	91.5%
Mixed or Multiple	95.3%	87.9%	86.2%	91.7%	93.6%	93.6%	93.4%	92.8%	91.6%	91.9%	93.6%	91.7%	90.7%	90.2%	90.7%	91.2%	91.3%	89.7%
Not disclosed / Not Known	94.9%	86.3%	86.4%	90.1%	91.5%	91.6%	92.6%	90.3%	91.2%	88.5%	91.1%	88.8%	88.5%	87.5%	87.2%	88.6%	88.4%	87.8%
Other	90.4%	83.3%	84.3%	88.9%	91.0%	91.1%	92.7%	91.0%	91.9%	88.2%	91.2%	90.2%	89.5%	87.9%	88.8%	89.6%	89.3%	88.9%
All	95.4%	88.8%	86.3%	90.7%	92.7%	92.8%	92.9%	91.6%	91.3%	90.2%	92.5%	90.5%	89.8%	89.1%	89.5%	89.9%	89.9%	88.4%

Attendance rates across Ethnic Background (Percentage of openings showing pupils were not in school because of any C19 related reason)

	17/8	24/8	31/8	7/9	14/9	21/9	28/9	5/10	12/10	19/10	26/10	2/11	9/11	16/11	23/11	30/11	7/12	14/12
White Scottish	0.8%	2.6%	2.4%	1.6%	1.4%	1.5%	1.3%	2.4%	2.6%	3.1%	2.6%	3.2%	4.1%	4.5%	4.3%	3.6%	3.6%	4.4%

White Other	1.4 %	3.1 %	2.7 %	1.7 %	1.4 %	1.6 %	1.5 %	2.2 %	2.2 %	3.2 %	2.7 %	2.9 %	3.4 %	3.7 %	3.5 %	3.1 %	3.3 %	3.7 %
Asian	1.3 %	2.9 %	2.5 %	1.9 %	2.0 %	2.2 %	1.6 %	2.9 %	2.6 %	2.5 %	3.5 %	4.5 %	5.4 %	5.8 %	5.0 %	4.1 %	4.6 %	4.1 %
African/Black/ Caribbean	0.9 %	2.0 %	2.4 %	1.4 %	1.3 %	2.1 %	1.2 %	2.6 %	1.5 %	2.2 %	2.4 %	3.5 %	4.6 %	5.3 %	4.2 %	3.1 %	3.6 %	3.5 %
Mixed or Multiple	1.0 %	3.2 %	2.8 %	1.7 %	1.4 %	1.7 %	1.3 %	2.2 %	2.5 %	2.6 %	2.4 %	2.9 %	3.9 %	4.4 %	3.9 %	3.4 %	3.0 %	3.9 %
Not disclosed / Not Known	1.0 %	3.5 %	2.8 %	1.9 %	1.8 %	1.8 %	1.6 %	2.9 %	2.8 %	3.0 %	3.1 %	4.1 %	4.9 %	5.5 %	5.1 %	3.9 %	3.8 %	4.1 %
Other	1.7 %	3.6 %	3.3 %	2.5 %	1.9 %	2.2 %	1.4 %	2.2 %	1.9 %	2.4 %	2.5 %	3.4 %	4.1 %	5.0 %	4.9 %	3.5 %	3.4 %	3.1 %
All	0.9 %	2.7 %	2.5 %	1.7 %	1.4 %	1.6 %	1.4 %	2.4 %	2.5 %	3.1 %	2.6 %	3.3 %	4.1 %	4.9 %	4.2 %	3.5 %	3.6 %	4.2 %

Annex E – SQA National Consultation

In SQA's National Consultation respondents had to select which subjects they would like to respond to proposed modifications on. They were then presented with questions for only those subjects. Every subject section included the same qualitative question inviting comment on issues of equality or accessibility:

“Are there any potential equality or accessibility issues introduced by the approach proposed for [insert subject title here?] What are they?”.

All equality and accessibility responses were analysed separately and were reported on in a broader equality impact assessment, available here: https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/equality-impact-assessment-modifications-to-national-courses-2020-21.pdf

The full Technical Consultation can be viewed here: https://www.sqa.org.uk/files_ccc/outcomes-national-consultation-2021.pdf



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