

Delivering the Alternative Certification Model (ACM)

A challenging term ahead

As well as the continuation of learning and teaching and priority being given to these, this term sees the commencement of Stage 2 of the National Qualifications Alternative Certification Model in which colleges will gather assessment evidence on which to base professional judgements of students' Provisional Results.

Doubtless, it will be a challenging ten weeks as lecturers and students strive to cover key aspects of courses and overtake the requisite assessment as advised by the SQA for each course. The recent period of college closure has made the delivery of the ACM for N5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses all the more demanding, but with firm reluctance on the part of the Scottish Government to delay certification, there is little alternative other than for teachers and lecturers to try to do what they always do for our young people even in the most testing of circumstances- that is their best.

Support for lecturers and students

That said, teachers and lecturers will not be acting alone to deliver the ACM and their health and wellbeing must be a priority. The ACM was designed on the premise that all key actors within the system would be working together and in support of the colleges and lecturers who are working directly with the young people for whom we are seeking to mitigate the disruption caused by the pandemic in terms of qualifications. For example, SQA has cancelled Round 2 verifications on our request, and similarly, mandatory Added Value Units have been removed from all N4 courses. At local level, lecturers should expect the full support of senior colleagues in college, as the endeavour to deliver evidence-based certification for young people is underway.

Prioritising workload

To be clear- this is a key priority this term for college departments which are delivering NQs. The EIS has been clear with stakeholders, and has secured their agreement, that other priorities which do not contribute to the safe delivery of the ACM require to be stood down or additional resource provided to enable their fulfilment.

Lecturers cannot and should not be asked to deliver what is required by way of marking, moderation and the associated record-keeping for the ACM, **and** everything else that they otherwise might have been doing within a normal academic year.

As with all workload, the work associated with the ACM must be deliverable within the parameters of the 35-hour working week. This may require a reduction in class contact time to allow more dedicated time for assessment and moderation, depending on the roles of individuals in delivering NQ learning and teaching and the ACM. The EIS nationally will monitor the situation regarding ACM-related workload.

£400 payment

Recent media focus on the £400 payment that will be made to lecturers and Secondary teachers in token recognition of their role in delivering the ACM in lieu of exams, has perhaps led to some misunderstanding that by accepting this payment, teachers' and lecturers' contractual terms and conditions relating to working time will be altered. This is not the case. The normal mechanisms for the control of workload and the provisions of the National Working Practices Agreement ('NWPA'), particularly in relation to the maximum limits of class contact, remain in place.

In the event of members' concern around unmanageable workload demands, a workload audit should be carried out with tasks itemised and the estimated/actual amount of time required for each task calculated. Where in any week, the number of hours of class contact time plus time for preparation and marking plus collective and course team activity time exceeds 35, then the matter should be raised with the appropriate line manager. Branch Reps are encouraged to support this process and may be called upon in the event that a satisfactory resolution cannot immediately be found. Where Branch Reps are unable to achieve a satisfactory resolution working with the senior management of the college, the matter should be raised with the Area Officer for that college.

Key EIS assessment principles

Professional judgement

In terms of the assessment component of the ACM, the EIS has sought to ensure adherence to several key principles- firstly, that lecturer professional judgement supported by collaboration among colleagues, is central to the process. As well as enhancing the strength of such judgements, collaboration around moderation of assessment provides lecturers with a degree of protection from pressure from students (and in some cases, from parents/carers) in relation to candidate results.

Evidence-based judgements

The EIS has also supported the premise that professional judgements should be based on evidence of demonstrated attainment. Again, this offers a protection to teachers and lecturers making judgements and reflects the views of young people who were aggrieved last session at the use of the SQA algorithm which did not take into account the assessment evidence that they themselves had produced, in determining their grades. The fairness principle is also at play here.

Scheduling of assessments

In terms of how candidate evidence is generated, the EIS has been consistently of the view that centres should not be running their own high stakes exam diets in lieu of the SQA diet. The ACM has afforded flexibility in designing their approaches to assessment in the interests of maximising time for learning and teaching, and in the interests of safety, the wellbeing of students, minimising inequity and managing teacher and lecturer workload. The scheduling of exam diets, particularly in the early stages of the new term, in the EIS view, will

swallow up time that would be better spent on learning, teaching and formative assessment, is detrimental to the wellbeing of young people and is likely to be particularly disadvantageous to the young people who have been disproportionately impacted by Covid and school and college closure- that is the poorest young people in our colleges.

There is no need for such assessments to take place at this time- the SQA does not require full assessment evidence now for its national sampling exercise which will form part of Stage 2 of the ACM (final details of the sampling approach will be published on 28th April) and the Provisional Results being submitted in June can be based on a series of key pieces of assessment for each course, which have been undertaken in a staggered way...and at a point in time when candidates are more prepared than immediately after the Easter break after a prolonged period of college closure, to undertake them.

SQA national sampling

The SQA retains its plans to sample candidate evidence from all schools and colleges as a means of providing further support in relation to understanding standards. On a proportionate basis, broadly speaking, centres will be requested to provide one or two pieces of locally quality assured evidence for a small number of courses per centre at one level only, for five candidates. The evidence can be partial or incomplete. The purpose of the exercise is to provide guidance in relation to the accuracy of assessment judgements in relation to the national standard, not to assess candidate performance. Where centres do not have evidence for the subject requested, they can contact the SQA requesting such support for another course level or course. Where possible, the SQA will seek to accommodate in order to try to ensure that support is being provided to centres on an equitable basis- that is that all centres have the opportunity to engage with this SQA service.

Local quality assurance

EIS-FELA Branches are encouraged to seek agreement through their Local Joint Negotiating Committees ('LJNCs') on approaches to local quality assurance and how resources will be channelled towards this. Branch Reps should be aware of the outcomes of relevant LJNC discussions or should contact the Branch Secretary for updates as necessary.

Action for Branch Reps

Hold a Branch meeting to discuss the terms of this advice and enable members to raise any issues.

Arrange a meeting with the College management to discuss the college's approach to assessment this term. Aim to secure agreement around:

- sound assessment practice in the interests of fairness to all students, wellbeing and equity for those most disadvantaged by school and college closure;
- the setting aside of other non-essential priorities in the interests of workload control;

- additional staffing/ class cover to support the delivery of the ACM;
- renewed commitment to collegiate working and prioritisation of lecturer wellbeing.

Ongoingly encourage strongly collegiate working throughout what will be a challenging term and remind members of the importance of balancing priorities in relation to the ACM with their own wellbeing needs.

Seek advice from the relevant Area Officer as necessary.