Delivering the Alternative Certification Model

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 schools will gather assessment evidence on which to base professional judgements of students' Provisional Results.

Doubtless, it will be a challenging ten weeks as teachers 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 school 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 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 teachers and schools

That said, teachers will not be acting alone to deliver the ACM and their health and wellbeing must be a priority. The alternative certification model was designed on the premise that all key actors within the system would be working together and in support of the schools and teachers 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, teachers should expect the full support of senior colleagues in school, and they in turn of the local authority, 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 Secondary schools this term. 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.

Teachers 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 some adjustment of Working Time Agreements and/or class contact time relief, 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 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' contractual terms and conditions relating to working time will be altered. This is not the case. The normal mechanisms for the control of workload 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 activity time exceeds 35, then the matter should be raised with the appropriate line manager. School Reps are encouraged to support this process and may be called upon in the event that a satisfactory resolution cannot immediately be found. Where School Reps are unable to achieve a satisfactory resolution working with the senior management of the school, the matter should be raised with the Local Association Secretary.

Early timetable change

On the advice of the EIS and SLS, the SQA extended the deadline for submission of Provisional Results in order to maximise time for learning, teaching and sound assessment of NQ students in the summer term in order that they have the best chance to succeed in spite of the difficult circumstances of this academic year. With both this and teacher workload and wellbeing in mind, it is not at all appropriate for schools to be considering an early timetable change as though this were a normal year. The current S4, S5 and S6 students will be working on their courses until the end of June, so there will be no scope to move new cohorts into existing timetable slots. The slots will not be vacant as they might have been in a normal year. Furthermore, the associated data entry is likely to pose a risk to the accuracy of SQA data systems which will still be managing data for the current NQ cohorts.

The rationale given for changing timetable might reference P7-S1 transition activities. The EIS is clear that this can be managed separately and proportionately given the wider context in which Secondary schools are currently working and the urgent need to prioritise the secure delivery of the ACM.

Justification for early change of timetable is also likely to include the pressure of time for course coverage. Whilst it is correct that adherence to patterns of annual presentation result in significant time pressure for teachers and students, this is a challenge that cannot be addressed this term. Rather, it will require to be addressed next session where schools are maintaining 2+2+2 models; longer term, the EIS would wish to see a move to two-year qualifications as per the original design intentions of CfE senior phase, which would eliminate this time pressure entirely and give more time and space for depth and enjoyment of learning…and teaching.

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 teacher 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 teachers with a degree of protection from pressure from students and 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 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 schools should not be running their own high stakes exam diets in lieu of the SQA diet. The ACM has afforded flexibility to schools 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 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 closure- that is the poorest young people in our schools.

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 school closure, to undertake them.

SQA national sampling

The SQA retains its plans to sample candidate evidence from all schools as a means of providing further support in relation to understanding standards. On a proportionate basis, broadly speaking, schools will be requested to provide locally quality assured evidence for a small number of courses per school 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 schools do not have evidence for the subject requested, they can contact the SQA requesting that such support for another course level or course. Where possible, the SQA will seek to accommodate in 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

Several LNCTs have agreed approaches to local quality assurance and how resources will be channelled towards this. Members should seek an update from the Rep.

Action for Members

Attend any Branch meeting that is called to discuss the terms of this advice.

Remember the importance of strongly collegiate working throughout what will be a challenging term and of the importance of balancing priorities in relation to the ACM with your own wellbeing needs.

Seek advice from the School Rep as necessary.