

Coronavirus (Covid-19) – Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment: Replacement of National Qualifications Exams in 2021 Session with an Alternative Certification Model

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This impact assessment considers the impacts to Child Rights and Wellbeing (CRWIA) as a result of the replacement of National Qualifications exams in 2021 session with an alternative certification model, due to Covid-19.

CRWIA Stage 1 Screening - key questions

1. Name the policy, and describe its overall aims.

Replacement of national qualifications exams in 2021 session with an alternative certification model

As part of the Scottish Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Deputy First Minister announced in October 2020 that due to continuing disruption all National 5 exams would be cancelled and replaced with an alternative certification model (ACM). A further announcement was made on 8 December 2020 stating that Higher and Advanced Higher exams in 2021 would also be cancelled.

The aim of the policy to replace National Qualifications exams in 2020-21 session with an ACM is to address the differential impact of Covid 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.

Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) are responsible for developing the ACM 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. Therefore, a full Childs Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) have been undertaken by SQA.¹

This EQIA and FSDA does, however, build on the EQIA and CRWIA entitled '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) teacher and lecturer estimates - 2020 results: EQIA](#)'. 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

¹ https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/2020-sqa-alternative-certification-model-equality-impact-assessment.pdf

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

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.

2. What aspects of the policy/measure will affect children and young people up to the age of 18?

The Articles of the UNCRC and the child wellbeing indicators under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 apply to all children and young people up to the age of 18, including non-citizen and undocumented children and young people.

This policy will replace the 2021 exams with an approach based on teacher judgement of evidence of pupil attainment which is considered the fairest way to ensure that learners' achievements are recognised in the current difficult circumstances, whilst ensuring confidence in the value of Scottish education.

3. What likely impact – direct or indirect – will the policy/measure have on children and young people?

'Direct' impact refers to policies/measures where children and young people are directly affected by the proposed changes, e.g. in early years, education, child protection or looked after children (children in care). 'Indirect' impact refers to policies/measures that are not directly aimed at children but will have an impact on them. Examples include: welfare reforms, parental leave, housing supply, or local transport schemes.

This policy change will directly impact all learners undertaking National Qualifications in academic session 2020-21.

This approach to awarding results in 2020 will impact around (predominantly) school-based learners, who were expecting to sit National 5, Higher or Advance Higher exams in Spring 2021 and who have faced significant disruption due to school closures, Covid-related absences and other associated reasons. It seeks to address the differential impact of Covid across the country and to individual learners, particularly Scotland's poorest and older pupils who may have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19.

Building on the analysis by SQA in their CRWIA¹ which highlighted five UN Convention on the Rights of Child (UNCRC) articles considered relevant:

Article 2 Non-discrimination

Article 2 states all children have the rights set out in the UNCRC, and individual children and young people shouldn't be discriminated against when these rights are realised. This covers both direct and indirect discrimination.

The Scottish Government has undertaken an [Equality Impact Assessment](#) covering this policy.

The Equality Impact Assessment sets out the steps taken by the Scottish Government to mitigate the risks of bias and discrimination in replacing exams in 2021 with an alternative certification model (ACM).

Article 3 Best interests of the child

Article 3 states that the interests of children and young people should be thought about at all levels of society, and that their rights should be respected by people in power

The variability in Covid-19 related absence rates across SIMD and Local Authority has raised 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.

Likewise, the feedback received from practitioners, either directly to the Scottish Government or via groups such as the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG), Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) and National Qualifications 2021 groups 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.

The evidence arising from the #LockdownLowdown reports also examined young people's opinions on exams and coursework.

Article 12 Right to be listened to and taken seriously

Article 12 recognises that children and young people do not have as much power as adults but states they still have the human right to have opinions and for these opinions to be heard and taken seriously.

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.

It builds on the EQIA and CRWIA entitled '[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) teacher and lecturer estimates - 2020 results: EQIA](#)' - [gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](#). It also considers the advice of, and measures that have been put in place since, the independent [Priestley review](#)³ reported in October 2020. This review included focus group sessions with young people.

Children and young people have also been involved in discussions around this policy decision via the governance group overseeing Scotland's education recovery – the Covid-19 Education Recovery Group (CERG), chaired by the Deputy First Minister – which has a representative from the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Private Ministerial panel discussions with Senior Phase pupils from Fife, Perth and Kinross, and Highlands and Islands also took place in early October and early December 2020.

Young people were consulted on the consultations on course modifications undertaken and the exam timetable undertaken by SQA at the start of the 2020-21 term.

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.

Article 17 Right to information

Article 17 of the UNCRC states that children and young people should be able to access information.

SQA hosts a range of information for learners on their web pages, with a dedicated webpage covering this year's assessment process - [Alternative certification model - National Qualifications 2020-21 - SQA](#). This includes a dedicated leaflet aimed at learners which is being distributed via schools - [What you need to know for 2021 - National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher \(sqa.org.uk\)](#)

³ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/rapid-review-national-qualifications-experience-2020/>

Article 28 Right to education

Article 28 of the UNCRC says that children and young people have the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability; if they're in detention, or if they're a refugee.

SQA provides assessment and certification of its qualifications for all learners taking National 5, Higher and Advance higher courses. To deliver the fairest approach for all learners, and to ensure that the achievements of young people were recognised, SQA was directed by the Scottish Government to replace the 2021 exam series with an alternative certification model based on teacher assessment of learner evidence.

4. Which groups of children and young people will be affected?

Under the UNCRC, 'children' can refer to: individual children, groups of children, or children in general. Some groups of children will relate to the groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. 'Groups' can also refer to children by age band or setting, or those who are eligible for special protection or assistance: e.g. preschool children, children in hospital, children in rural areas, looked after children, young people who offend, victims of abuse or exploitation, child migrants, or children living in poverty.

All learners, the majority of which will be between ages 15 -18, undertaking National 5, Higher and Advance Higher courses will be affected by this policy decision giving all young learners their teacher or lecturer estimated grade as a minimum award.

A full Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) was undertaken to consider the potential impact on children and young people with protected characteristics. The EQIA illustrates 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.

5. Will this require a CRWIA?

Explain your reasons.

A full CRWIA was undertaken by SQA on the proposed modifications to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher course assessments for session 2020-21⁴. This scoping CRWIA builds on that analysis.

This policy will secure fairness in how learners' achievement will be recognised during Covid related disruption to learning in 2020-21, whilst ensuring confidence in the value of Scottish education.

The revised approach to awarding results in 2021 is a direct result of analysing data on school absence levels since schools returned in August 2020, alongside engagement and listening to the concerns of stakeholders, including young people themselves.

From the available evidence, this revised policy is in the best interests of children and young people in Scotland. This policy change addresses the varying impacts of Covid-19 related disruption to Senior Phase learners.

CRWIA Declaration

CRWIA required

CRWIA not required

CRWIA is not required

Authorisation

Policy lead

Senior Phase Unit

Date

May 2021

Deputy Director or equivalent

Malcolm Pentland
Deputy Director for Curriculum,
Qualifications and Gaelic

Date

May 2021

⁴ [Child Rights and Wellbeing 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/child-rights-and-wellbeing-impact-assessment-proposed-modifications-to-national-5-higher-and-advanced-higher-course-assessments-for-session-2020-21)



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