

# Scottish Youth Parliament

## SQA Equality Impact Assessment and Alternative Certification Model

### Project Report

#### June 2020



## Background

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratic voice of Scotland's young people. Our 160 members are aged to 14 to 25 and are elected by young people across the country to represent them. SYP's membership is very diverse, with a broadly even gender split and with many members representing some of Scotland's most deprived communities.

COVID-19 has led to a number of changes to the way that SYP works, including a significant increase in the ability of MSYPs to engage with each other, with their constituents, and with policy makers remotely, i.e. using digital formats.

Following a joint meeting between the senior teams at SQA and SYP a proposal was agreed looking at how SYP and its members can support the vital work of the SQA at this critical moment. It was agreed that the two organisations would explore partnership working in various ways.

The first of these projects that the SQA team identified was a role SYP could play in supporting the SQA to include the voices of young people as part of its equality impact assessment on its Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for Certification 2020.

On that basis, SYP held a series of focus groups with Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPS) covering 4 key thematic areas, in consultation with the SQA.

These themes are as follows:

**Theme 1 - The impact that enforced home learning has had on learners**

**Theme 2 - The Alternative Certification Model**

**Theme 3 - Equalities - linking to the equality impact assessment**

**Theme 4 - The future of assessment**

Virtual focus group discussions were held with our members in June 2020, including with our Education and Lifelong Committee, on a series of agreed questions on the equalities and rights implications of the changes to the ACM for Certification for 2020.

Each session was co-designed and delivered with young people and SQA staff, and chaired by an MSYP, in line with SYP's youth led ethos.

The SQA team have made it clear to SYP that the Equalities theme is the priority one, and asked SYP to produce this initial report focussing on that content within a tight timeframe, hence the reason for the data being presented in the format that follows.

## Outputs and Outcomes

Outcome:

- To ensure that a diverse range of young people are meaningfully engaged in SQA's equality impact assessment on its Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for Certification 2020.

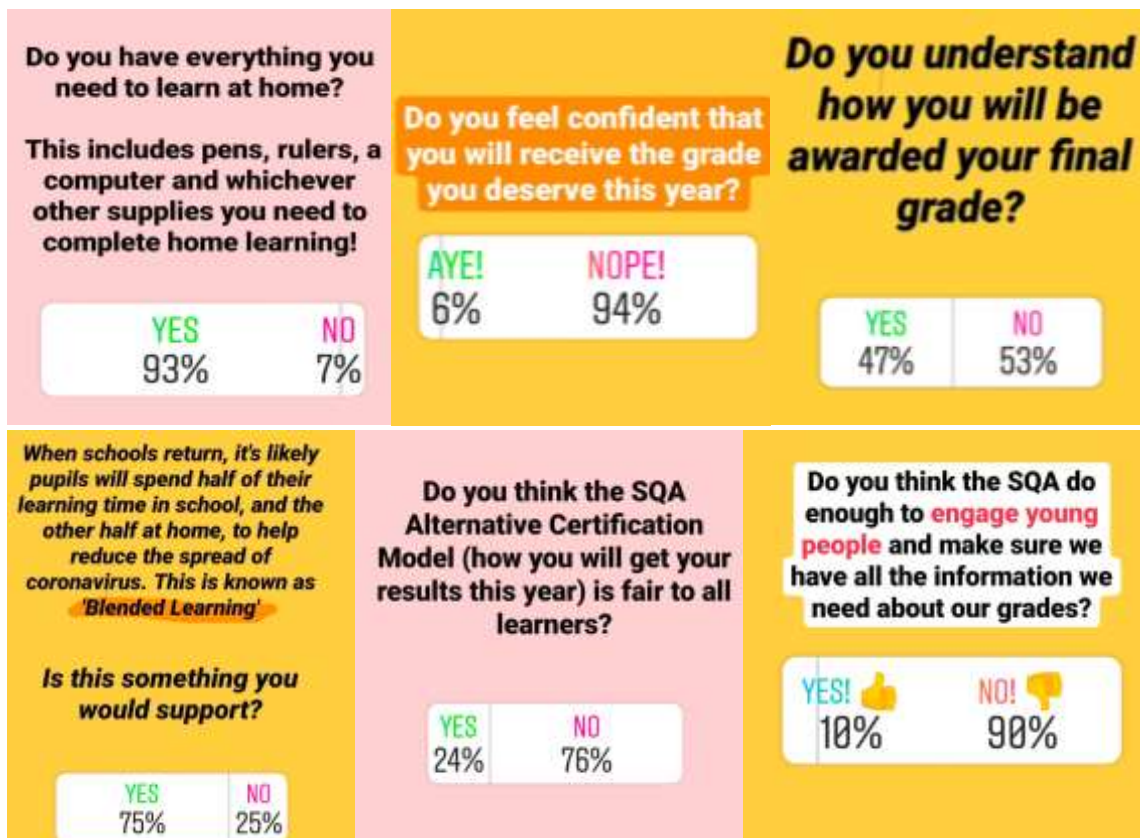
Outputs:

- A series of virtual focus groups for young people aged 14-18, each chaired by an MSYP, based on a series of themes that have been co-designed by young people, the SQA and SYP staff
- One report summarising key findings from all of the sessions, including quantitative data and qualitative data, such as quotes and case studies
- An opportunity for a group of MSYPs to present the findings of the report to senior SQA staff team, and for the young people involved to hear directly from the SQA on what will happen next

## Methodology

On finalising the focus group questions with SQA, SYP staff linked in with the SYP projects Trustee (i.e. a young person) to identify the MSYPs who we would ask to facilitate our focus groups. Four MSYPs were approached and asked to facilitate one focus group each. SYP developed a briefing document for facilitators, which outlined the purpose and format of the focus groups, the four themes agreed with SQA and the set questions, along with prompts and facilitator notes.

SYP invited our four facilitators to a training session where we went through the briefing document and SQA's ACM document for learners, which the facilitators agreed to read out during the sessions. The facilitators had the opportunity to ask questions and were encouraged to reach out to SYP staff should they have any further queries in advance of the sessions. The facilitators agreed to arrive at their session fifteen minutes early with SQA staff, so they had the chance to run through the session plan and ask any final questions. A separate briefing document was sent to all focus group participants in advance of the sessions, along with SQA's ACM document for learners. Participants were encouraged to ask peers and constituents for their views on the relevant topics in advance of the session. Many used social media platforms, such as Instagram polls, to gather information from peers. See examples below:



Each session lasted between 1 hour and 1 hour 30 minutes. We began each session as a whole group on Zoom, with one SYP staff member taking notes, and another supporting the facilitator. The facilitators were given the option to split their group into separate break out rooms during the session, but three out of four facilitators chose to keep the session as one group for the duration. During the third focus group, the facilitator split participants into two break out rooms to discuss themes 2, 3 and 4, with an SYP staff member facilitating the second group. Each theme was discussed for approximately 15 minutes, after which the break out groups came back together to give feedback from their discussion.

Using Zoom as a format allowed participants to make use of features such as the 'reactions', which they used in every session to signal to facilitators when they wished to speak. The 'chat' function also allowed participants to add to the conversation in a different way, which many opted to do. Overall, the use of Zoom was helpful in allowing the facilitator to keep track of the conversation, and to ensure that no one dominated the session.

# Focus Group Analysis

## Theme 1 - Strengths and Challenges of Home Learning

During each focus group Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament gave their own opinions and experiences and the opinions and experiences of those they had consulted with prior to the focus group. The below headings are grouped under thematic headings of the key topics discussed in relation to strengths and challenges of home learning

### Strengths

Participants enjoyed the flexibility of working from home, and having the freedom to work at their own pace. Some also commented that individual teachers had been going the extra mile in terms of checking in, and ensuring that online lessons were of as high a quality as possible. It was also referenced that school leavers have had the chance to use software such as Microsoft Teams while learning at home, which would be useful in future employment.

Below are direct quotes taken from the focus groups on the strengths of home learning:

- *“For some people, learning at home is good because you can learn at your own pace. Exams have been cancelled, and for some people there’s less pressure on learning now.”*
- *“Some are finding it better than school as you can learn at your own pace and take a break when you want, which you often can’t in class. Some people like home learning and some people really don’t and despise it. Everyone has a different opinion on it.”*
- *“I think the ability to be flexible around times that learning has been taking place has been a huge strength along with working at your own pace.”*
- *“In my experience some teachers are doing forms and other consultation about how students are finding learning at home, how they are getting on and what they are learning.”*
- *“Although there seems to be less online teaching i.e. skype or zoom learning. One strength about it is that some teachers have taken the initiative and are doing online classes that are really well put together.”*
- *“Home learning gives much more flexibility, i.e. Advanced Higher study is going well and doing more on your own.”*
- *“There is so much social anxiety around and going outside or to places where there will be lots of people is too much. It’s good to know that we’re still learning and doing schoolwork as opposed to falling further behind by not being at school.”*
- *“Online learning has been a positive experience for school leavers. Using teams and software will have a positive impact down the line for collaboration and using teams for other absence to catch up in the future.”*

## Challenges

### Lack of Consistency

A lack of consistency was referenced in several areas, including inconsistency in workload across different subjects, differing approaches of individual teachers, and inconsistency across different schools and local authority areas. Many participants felt that this lack of consistency added to confusion and anxiety around changes to learning.

Below are direct quotes taken from the focus groups on the challenges of home learning:

- *“No uniformed approach across school subjects and departments has led to no set way of learning. Whereas in a school, learning is much more structured in class. I feel this hasn’t been effectivity transferred over to home learning.”*
- *“Not much communication from school LA or SQA and there doesn’t seem to be much of a plan to be honest. The majority of people I spoke to in advance didn’t feel they were getting the right level of communication.”*
- *“There have been huge gaps in learning, with no LA or gov intervention to say, right, schools need to do this, there doesn’t seem to be much of that at all.”*
- *“I see very few positives, this is making the inequality deeper in education, there’s no uniformed policy in place so it’s not consistent. Even within schools, some teachers are doing things differently with some working really hard to have work up and some are putting up one thing a week.”*
- *“Some subjects have been sending any work home, but even within schools there’s such a difference in what teachers are doing.”*
- *“Teachers having a set thing would make this better, so it’s not different in per council.”*
- *“There’s a lot of disparity between subjects, we don’t have a lot of the equipment that’s needed to do all subjects. If you’re doing music, there’s no access to the instruments and the practical side is lacking. Music theory is important but not what it’s about.”*
- *“Constituents have found all of the subjects is really difficult, to do online, when you’re given work and expected to just to get on with it without much input from teachers. Some teachers are more responsive than others, some get back in 5 minutes and some take a few days. It’s hard to get the support sometimes.”*
- *“Teachers and technology getting used to software etc is so different. Some of our teachers all have different levels of knowledge of online teaching which is difficult for online learning.”*
- *“Personally - I’ve been struggling with work. Some teachers are active and some aren’t, some take a week to reply to a question, which is difficult for me especially around Advanced Higher Courses which have been really difficult. A lot of it is motivation and feeling like you’re a part of something.”*

### Challenge of Solo Learning

Some participants found learning difficult without group work and class discussions. Depending on learning style, this has impacted learners to varied degrees. For some learners, the social element to learning and the ability to ask questions in a classroom were very important.

Some of these challenges are reflected below:

- *“All learning is from PowerPoints and no one is doing video calls. Our council is saying that it’s child protection thing and saying that teachers can’t do zoom lessons or video teaching. I’m finding that really difficult not to see other people.”*
- *“Apathy has been high towards learning with peers, some teachers being less reliable, we are having to do our own thing and get together to sort stuff.”*
- *“Most people I heard from did have a phone or laptop, there were some people who have one laptop between the whole family and parents need this for work. So pupils are doing work late at night when the laptop is free.”*
- *“It’s quite strange, I take all social subjects and it’s hard to have the discussion-based elements at home, I feel like I’m missing quite a bit of classroom discussions. Also, friends who take the other sciences can’t do science experiments and maths is hard to do online.”*
- *“One of the constituents I spoke to said: It’s not so much equipment, it’s group work that we’re missing out on. The sharing ideas and discussion isn’t there at the moment, and the other kind of collaborations that happen in a classroom. It’s quite hard to ask teachers questions (to clarify something) as you have to ask them in front of everyone else in a chat and the informal support that you get from friends isn’t there “like, oh I missed that what did he say”?*

## Discipline and Keeping Focused

For some learners, the lack of structure and classroom environment has negatively impacted their learning experience, as finding motivation at home has been more difficult. It was referenced that younger students would be more negatively impacted by this than senior students.

Key quotes on discipline and keeping focussed are below:

- *“Senior students are more likely to thrive in this, as opposed to juniors who aren’t as disciplined and need a teacher to do work. It’s not been good - distinct lack of motivation across year groups and school isn’t really engaging with us. There hasn’t been any consultation on what work we would like to do, just teachers setting tasks.”*
- *“Constituents have said that discipline is challenging [as in keeping focussed]. Some said at the start of the year maybe not as focused, because you know you’ve the whole year to revise and get ready for exams, whereas now we’re all trying to catch up and it’s not going to be marked or have an impact on grades so what’s the point? Feel like two years of work was for nothing, if there’s no exams, people are feeling angry about that.*
- *“Siblings and family are always about which is a distraction.”*
- *“As a school leaver there has been no course work to complete. Not having a lot to do, not a lot of support from staff and it has felt like an extended summer holiday. The School has let us know about some free courses/webinars that were advertised online to continue learning.”*

- *“Loss of motivation and difficult to get in the habit of studying independently I’ve found this has led to increasing anxiety about school, school work and exam results. A blended approach to learning is good for continuous assessment and combats uncertainty at this time.”*

## Time Management

Linked to focus and discipline, some learners found that time management at home was a significant challenge. Participants missed the structure of a school day, which has been difficult to recreate from home.

Participants gave some examples of this in the direct quotes below:

- *“There seems to be two types of people: Those setting a routine has been key and setting time to go out for a walk and stopping at the end of the day and not thinking about it till the next day, and those who’s sleep patterns are all over the place, sleeping late, and staying up way too late has had a detrimental impact.”*
- *“I don’t think time management should be down to the individual learner, at school we are told where to be and when to be there, it’s a real skill, and at our age to immediately be able to manage time, when we’ve never had to before. It’s not the same, it’s not fair and it can’t be seamless. In a classroom you don’t have much of a choice to get on with the work.”*
- *“A task that could take 1 hour, takes 3 hours, because I split it up with breaks and get distracted or end up doing something different and going back to it.”*
- *“Learning at home is really difficult to focus, I have been leaving work till the night before so I have to do it (forced to). I’m finding it really difficult to find structure. It’s like you’re on your own that it, good luck.”*

## Lower Quality of Learning

For a number of participants, home learning has lacked guidance and structure so far. Some participants felt that teachers hadn’t been checking in as much as they would have liked. It was also raised that limited teacher contact has had a particularly detrimental impact on learning in certain subjects, such as languages and music.

Participants gave some examples of this in the direct quotes below:

- *“Work is being set weekly, although some is being set without much guidance or intervention. Work sometime is being set at too high a level for individual learning.”*
- *“Posting a few PDFs isn’t the same as learning in the classroom and that’s what teachers are expecting of us.”*
- *“Teachers are giving work, and all teachers are giving big amounts, and not thinking about workload. The amount that you are being asked to complete is not realistic. And breaking it down isn’t easy in to manageable information sizes.”*
- *Some have found it good at the beginning, but are starting to feel that they’re falling behind now.”*

- *“Our school hasn’t been checking in. Our school sent two types of emails to pupils. One saying you’re doing well and the other saying we’re not doing well. But there was no motivation to change habits, or keep doing well.”*
- *“Lack of checking in has been an issue. Consistently checking in is key. Homework is not being enforced and if you don’t do it there’s no fall out or consequences.”*
- *“My school was able to give our music equipment. But most people said they were lacking a teacher during the subjects.”*
- *“I’m doing three languages this year, including a language that I’ve never learned before - German, so I have no one to practice with and has been a big barrier.”*

## Poverty and Deprivation

Participants raised that pupils from disadvantaged areas were being impacted more negatively than others, due to a lack of digital equipment, data and WIFI, and supplies for subjects such as art and music.

- *“The main issue for my area is poverty, from where I’m from, a lot of people I know share bedrooms and have small spaces. There’s also no equipment - no art supplies, no musical instruments. If you only have pen and paper, for the more practice subjects it’s not working. “*
- *“I’ve heard a lot about not having enough supplies for art and science. One of the good things about the highlands is that every secondary school pupil was given a Chromebook. This is a way to bridge the gap, but WIFI in rural areas is an issue.”*
- *“SMID areas and those from disadvantaged areas who don’t have access to wifi so can’t use the ipads to get in touch with teachers or use the ipad to the full potential.”*
- *“What my council and some others have done is to have boxes with pencils, notebooks and stuff in random areas (post offices, local supermarkets) around the town and they will continue to fill the boxes up so you have what you need! You might have a laptop at home, but not pens and paper.”*
- *“A big issue for my family has been the lack of a printer. Sometimes I have to copy out the work that’s been given on paper and then complete it. It’s the same for my younger siblings, my mum copies out their work, drawings and spelling and then they do it, but it take a lot of time for my mum to do that.*
- *However, getting in touch with teachers has been an issue; the internet where I live isn’t great, the internet cuts out in the middle of meetings. “*
- *“WiFi isn’t good at home, calls drop, cant really upload things, some people are learning on their phones all day who don’t have a laptop.”*

Theme 3 contains further analysis and examples on the topic of poverty and deprivation.



## Theme 2 - The Alternative Certification Model

Overall, the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was well received by participants during this section. During each focus group the participants were shown the guidance that was provided by the SQA ([linked here](#)) and the facilitator read out the summary information highlighting the process. The discussion on the Alternative Certification Model focused on the following sub categories: appeals, estimates, coursework, prelims and progress.

### Appeals:

The appeals element of the ACM was discussed with participants. Largely participants were questioning the consistency, process and the lack of input individual learners have had, especially if the school or teachers put in an estimate that the learner does not agree with and there was no opportunity to be heard. The majority of participants were happy that the appeals process was free.

Below are a summary of quotes relating to the discussions had about the appeals process:

- *“I think for the most part, this [ACM] is a decent model in the circumstances. But the appeal process needs work, as you can only appeal if your estimate is lower than the grade you were given.”*
- *“Teacher bias would be an issue here some teachers might say you’re going to fail and then you work hard and end up with a B so there’s a consistency issue.”*
- *“If there’s not an option to review this it can be an issue.”*
- *“The new model is a bit of a double-edged sword. The positives are the appeals system, usually appeals can be a barrier, offering them as free is necessary.”*
- *“The Appeal system can work against the student.”*
- *“The appeals thing is something that personally I have an issue. Because if I don’t agree with the grade I get, but it’s what my teacher put, I can’t appeal this.”*
- *“I have an issue with the appeals system. You can only appeal if what your school has put forward. What if I disagree with what my school has put forward. Teachers are professionals, but it’s also human nature If you don’t like someone or the bad children will get a lesser grade, if you can’t appeal against your teachers - it’s really not fair.”*

*Other elements relating the appeals feedback from an equalities perspective can be found in Theme 3.*

### Estimates:

Participants raised concerns about the application of estimates, particularly if schoolwide averages, which are based on past or present or present attainment, were to be taken in to consideration. Participants developed this point further by discussing what impact this might have on their results. Discussions continued and other concerns were raised for those who perform well on exam day, or had worked hard to improve on their prelim grade will be estimated lower.

- *“Major concern as my school's attainment was so low, which terrifies me if it is going on school averages. School attainment is improving, but we’re worried.”*

- *“If it is going off prelim grades for teacher’s estimates, some schools do open prelims which wouldn’t be fair to those who do closed book. Also, when I did my National 5s I got a C in maths and then got an upper A in the final exam.”*
- *“Past estimates shouldn’t be used as it totally undermines what students are going now. It’s unfair for students in poor attaining schools to be based on previous year groups when attainment has improved dramatically in the last few years.”*
- *“There are two very different reactions. First - if you did well in prelims, you’re fine with an estimated grade. Second - If you didn’t do as well or didn’t study or used them for what prelims are for, to learn from mistakes you’re worried because of a low estimate. This is really worrying and hard on them.”*
- *“For the SQA to look at different schools and adjust grading based on previous estimates, I wouldn’t want my grade to be graded on the average of the whole school.”*

## **Prelims**

Focus group participants talked about how differing and varied prelims are across Scotland and often prelims are individual to schools. Participants shared their experience and those of their constituents and discussed that they feel prelims are a test run for the full exam diet in May and often not taken as seriously because there’s time to catch up and perform better.

- *The Maths prelim at our school in particular was really hard, and in another school was made up of past papers that were given to pupils in advance - where is the parity of prelims.*
- *Prelims are so varied, its’ not representative of the actual exam. It’s not fair as some of the prelims were really hard compared to others.*
- *Some of the people I talked to said, if exams can’t run, this is the next best thing. Prelims in our school are not seen as final. Prelims are a test and then you work really hard after the prelims to get the grade that you want for the main exam.*
- *A lot of people in our survey also say that they use prelims as a practice run and don’t study as much for prelims as the May exams so prelim results don’t always represent the full potential*

## **Coursework:**

Following from the previous discussions on appeals, estimates and prelims, coursework came across in several focus groups. Specifically, the participants talked about the confusion around whether coursework was being considered as part of the estimate grade and why coursework was taken away a few years ago.

There were some specific concerns to coursework that are highlighted below:

- *“there’s been a lot of confusion around National 5 coursework - at one point teachers told us that all coursework is being taken in to account, and now it’s no coursework. This has led to huge confusion about what we should be doing or focusing our efforts on.”*
- *“Coursework could be submitted electronically or oral exams could be conducted online. There are very few courses that you don’t have an evidence bank of when it comes to exams.”*

- *“Not marking course work is problematic, it needs to be marked, even if it’s not used so we know where we stand, and in this situation, coursework would have helped so much.”*
- *“Since the SQA did away with unit assessments. Since there’s no uniformed standard across all schools, it’s going to be much harder to assign grades.”*
- *“The negatives are around the trust in pupils.”*

## **Progress:**

Participants in the focus groups highlighted that they had questions and concerns about the progress they have made after the prelim exam not being recognised, concerns about moving forward to the next level of qualification next year, having not completed some of the course, and concerns about not attaining the grades that they need to move forward to their next destination.

The below quotes are grouped under the heading of progress.

- *“I had to work really hard in English, and I didn’t get the mark I wanted in prelim and I don’t think the progress is being recognised, it will also influence subject choices and level of the courses available to me for next year and might mean I can’t take the higher.”*
- *“Especially when school wasn’t intending on letting you sit the exam after the result of the prelim.”*
- *“We haven’t even finished the course, the last two topics we didn’t finish, which isn’t giving a strong foundation for higher and things will have to be retaught next year or there will be a lot of resits.”*
- *“Having missed national 5 exams, I’m a bit worried about higher exams being our first experience of actual exams and how this might affect people.”*
- *“I had a lot of responses on Instagram. People are a bit annoyed that it’s not reflecting their full potential.”*
- *“I need a specific grade in maths to get in to the apprenticeship and a few weeks before lockdown I got a new teacher who doesn’t know us very well - it’s worrying to think about the future that this person who I has only taught me a few times can award my grade.”*

## **Strengths and Challenges**

Some initial observations on strengths and challenges of the ACM model based on an overview of the 4 focus groups carried out:

### **Strengths**

- *“Good that appeal system is free”*
- *“Beneficial for students who don’t perform well in exams”*
- *“Reduce the stress of exams”*
- *“SQA are doing things differently - which is good”*
- *“It’s came around quickly due to COVID”*
- *“Quite happy that the grade is based on their work from the entire year, rather than one exam. Going forward blended approach in the future. But let us know what’s happening for next year ASAP.”*

## Challenges

- *“The grade that you get has to be lower than the one that your school give you.”*
- *“Disadvantage pupils who pick things up later in the year in advance for the exam.”*
- *“If you haven’t had the teacher before or only for this year, they’re determining your grade when they don’t really know me.”*
- *“Teachers can underestimate pupils. My prelims were always really low. So teachers never expected much from me until the exam.”*
- *“The system needs take in to account course work”*
- *“My teachers are really harsh throughout the year with predicted grades, to make us work harder. Teacher bias can be an issue here.”*
- *Usually prelims don’t matter that much unless you’re appealing, so a lot of learners perceive that prelims don’t count. It disadvantages people who perform well in an exam situation.*
- *How it can be improved - the appeals - it’s difficult as there’s nothing like this that’s happened before.*
- *How the disparity of prelims is an issue, such a big difference. Prelims are a chance to learn your strengths and weaknesses and they’re not the main thing.*

## Ways to build/improve or change the ACM approach?

Following the discussion on the strengths and challenges the following statements are quotes from participants.

- *“Take coursework in to account. In some subjects this can be up to 40% of the grade.”*
- *“Speaking exams and thing relating to coursework or the subject that have done prior to Covid-19 should be taken in to account as evidence for grading estimates and appeals.”*
- *“More transparency and be upfront of what is going on. This isn’t being conveyed by schools, so official communications from SQA/SG should be going out directly to young people.”*

## More information/Communication

During the conversation on ways to build and improve or change the ACM approach participants highlighted communication and lack of information as a key issue. Particularly the process of communicating with learners. In summary, participants did not feel that they were getting consistent information passed on from their schools and felt that SQA should have a direct method of conversation.

We collected the following points that asked for further clarification on several issues:

- *“How the appeal process works”*
- *“A lot of people have said that it might not be possible to have exams at all next year, because we don’t know what will happen in the future with this virus”*
- *“If there a way that we can sit a later exam or another way to prove our learning it would be better. Universities were able to move to online examination with open books, why couldn’t schools?”*

- *“Our Highers have been cancelled and since S1, we’ve been told these are the most important exams of our lives, if we don’t get the grades where do we go from here.”*
- *“Also I thought that the SQA said that your grade couldn’t go down this year. This seems to be a change from the guidance that came out at the start. In general, there needs to be more clarity on what’s happening. Engage with young people much more, and give us all the reasons for changing things, clearly communicate changes - If you don’t it creates a mistrust and how rumours start with lots of miss information. Also, don’t rely on things coming out from schools, they’re clearly not passing on everything we need to know.”*
- *“More information about the estimates and the process”*
- *“More information on the extent to which SQA will take prior achievement into consideration”*
- *“More communication on provisions being made for groups who are more likely to be disadvantaged, can SQA identify these groups”*

## Future Perceptions

We asked focus group participants if they have any concerns about the perception of their exam results in comparison to previous years? The focus group participants were worried about their future prospects based on the perception of the exam results this year, in particular those who have applied for university, apprenticeships and employment. The perception of the learners is that their qualifications will be seen as having less value or that this years result will be looked on less favourably, specifically with further and higher education institutions. There are also some perceptions negative amongst other learners about the exam results this year.

Below are the direct quotes relating to the future perceptions:

- *“Employers looking at grades from this year, might take a high grade as something very positive that the person is a hard worker, and a low grade might reflect badly on someone and appear that they are lazy or someone who hasn’t put in as much effort. “*
- *“Employers might think that we got off easy and regardless of the grade not look at it fairly. “*
- *How will employers or universities look at it, if I look at it like it didn’t deserve it/differently.*
- *“Applications for higher education/further education places values from the previous academic year and what grade you got then as opposed to the current year, which isn’t based on exam.”*
- *“I hope that’s not the case and I do think about it and hope it doesn’t affect applications to higher education. I keep thinking what if it does affect my future. “*
- *“Universities aren’t offering unconditional based on these exams?”*
- *“Maybe university might be slightly easier or more lenient on bad grades than future employers might.”*
- *“Some courses didn’t actually finish, so it’s difficult thinking how this will impact first year at university, will I have gaps in my learning going forward. I get a grade*

*for 2/3 of a course that I didn't sit an exam for - This might not affect the grade, but effect the understanding."*

- *"There were quite a few people that said that going to Further/Higher Education that estimated grades will be adjusted. Lowering entrance requirements."*
- *"Some people might see exam results as less legit this year, as you've not sat an exam and based on an estimate."*
- *"People view it one of two ways, some teachers will say you deserves it and some people might be more lenient at the moment because of the pandemic."*
- *"I hope the class of 2020 exam results aren't seen as the year that "they got let off".*
- *"If I sat the exam would I really have got this grade? The grades don't feel real, all the work that we've done is for nothing."*
- *"I've had pressures this year, and if I sat the exam for my advanced Highers, I probably would have failed, but now I don't think I'll fail, I'll get an estimate, but I didn't have to do any extra work or effort."*
- *"Concern that results will generally be lower for those who tend to progress/raise their grades from prelims to end of year exams"*

## Theme 3 - Equalities

During each focus group Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament gave their own opinions and experiences and the opinions and experiences of those they had consulted with prior to the focus group. The below headings are grouped under thematic headings of the key topics discussed in relation to equalities impact.

### Poverty and Deprivation

Poverty and deprivation were recurring issues raised by participants across all focus groups. The majority of participants highlighted concerns around how poverty and deprivation link to inequality and the attainment gap.

In summary, the participants were concerned about the impact that living in a more deprived area or area with high SIMD<sup>1</sup> index will have on estimated awards. Young people were concerned that, if a school had made progress in raising attainment, that this might not be reflected in estimates, due to lack of evidence based on previous the years results. There were also concerns raised in relation to limited space at home and how some home environments have impacted learners' ability to work and attain at home should home learning be continued in to the next school year.

There were specific concerns around how this might impact equality in the direct quotes from young people below.

- *“If a school has historically had low attainment, this model enables that pattern to continue.”*
- *“[Poverty] could have a negative impact on people who are more disadvantaged: there are normally lots of opportunities to progress after prelims, extra support is usually put in place for pupils who haven't done so well to allow them to progress, but now they are suffering by being averaged out/having grades based on estimates.”*
- *“When the process is generalised [like the estimating of grades nationally], less advantaged people are more likely to be negatively impacted.*
- *“In my constituency there's lots of deprived areas. In school league tables, the deprived areas don't attain well and those people in these areas will be harder hit in the assessment/accreditation and awarding of exams based on this bias, if the previous results are used and based on previous years attainment levels. This would further the attainment gap and lead to wider issues in Scotland.”*
- *“Learners in schools from higher attainment areas will be brought back up, but individuals in schools with lower attainment levels are at risk of being brought down.”*
- *The main issue [for my area] is poverty, from where I'm from, a lot of people I know share bedrooms and have small [living] spaces. They are also sharing equipment.”*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://simd.scot/#/simd2020/BTTTTT/9/-4.0000/55.9000/>

## Attainment

Attainment was discussed throughout the different thematic question areas. Other topics linked to attainment have been grouped under the relevant heading. In summary, participants were concerned that the attainment gap will only get bigger as a result of COVID-19, enforced home learning and estimated exam results.

Below are some focused points relating to attainment, where not covered elsewhere.

- *“Consider how this will impact that attainment gap, it will really disadvantage those from poorer areas and this will show in the results. Now that there are no exams [this year] this discrepancy will be heightened. This will disadvantage those who are already disadvantaged.”*
- *“[During consultations with constituents they raised] concerns about how SQA and schools can balance things out: how do they identify which pupils have been the worst impacted, and help them in a way that doesn’t make it unfair for everyone else.”*
- *“[Online and blended learning] can increase the attainment gap and disproportionately effect people. “*

## Equal Opportunities and Parity of Access

During the conversations about equality, the topic of parity of access and opportunity came up repeatedly. In particular the participants discussed concerns around how school and attending school supported equality, i.e. that, in school, no pupil should be at a disadvantage because of their home circumstances, access to technology, or access to materials

A discussion evolved which highlighted the discrepancy between learning approaches across Scotland regarding the provision of school books, musical instruments and art supplies. Several participants said that they had received no deliveries of supplies or equipment to help them learn, however, other participants said that they had equipment supplied and delivered within the first weeks of lockdown.

These quotes below set out some specific issues the young people identified:

- *“One young person highlighted that school is a level playing field for all to achieve, this is not the case at the moment.”*
- *“Any household who has more than one person learning and working from home and you are sharing computers will be adversely affected at this time.”*
- *“School is an equaliser. “*
- *“No equipment at home for practical subjects - no paint for art, no musical instruments, no science experiments it’s not making things easy.”*
- *“Although another participant said that their school had delivered all pupils who were learning an instrument with relevant equipment, this issue in this instance was more the one to one teaching with councils not one to one video calls.”*
- *“Some schools are getting daily interactions with teachers; some are only getting weekly or less - the level of disparity is huge across Scotland. “*
- *“If you have decided to change your mind on your subject choice for next year, I think this situation has made that more difficult to change or move direction. “*



## Rural Access

Living rurally was discussed several times across the focus groups. The main issues were focussed on connectivity. A few participants, from Highland region, noted that every school pupil receive a laptop from the authority which has helped their ability to move to home learning quickly. Non rural participants commented on what a good idea that was and another participant said that Glasgow City Council was in the process of rolling out iPads to all pupils.

Others highlighted that the internet connections (even good internet connections) in rural areas were not adequate enough to handle the bandwidth required for home learning.

Discrepancies between work-setting and checking-in were highlighted in this section, which is also covered in Theme 1 - Enforced home learning.

Below are some direct quotes from young people on this theme:

- *“Not everyone [in rural areas] has good access to the internet. This is a huge challenge to learning online and any online testing. [there are] other people [working] on our Wi-Fi at home, if my parents are on meetings, my brother is doing an online class, the internet can’t cope.”*
- *“Living rurally [in Aberdeenshire] the young people have had a completely different experience - [in my experience] Glow is an unreliable source, teachers have tried their best. We need to register twice a day [with school], once in the morning and once in the afternoon which gives you two 2- hour blocks of learning a day, weekly assignments are submitted online. The infrastructure using Glow has been unreliable and making submitting coursework and other learning very difficult - lots of coursework is getting lost and we are getting weekly video updates from Head Teacher.”*
  - *Another participant highlighted that they have to register weekly, and work is set weekly in their school, what they have found is that most people do all the work in one day so they have the rest of the week off.*
- *“Highland example - every pupil has a Chromebook - One good thing about living in the highlands is that every secondary school pupil was given a Chromebook. This is a way to bridge the gap, but Wi-Fi is an issue in the highlands.*
- *“Glasgow is also in the middle of a roll out of iPads to every secondary pupil, this has made a difference to my home learning, I’m using mine right now, but we were one of the early ones, the full roll out isn’t complete yet, but I’ve found it useful for sure!”*

## Absenteeism and Poor Health

Absenteeism was discussed in relation to estimating grades and how, if a young person has a poor attendance record, they may not have completed coursework or may not have had limited contact time with a teacher to have an accurately reflected estimate based on their ability. The participants of this focus group suggested that absenteeism and poor health should be taken in to account as an equalities issue, i.e. that those young people with an existing health condition that made them less likely to have a good attendance record might be impacted disproportionately.

Here are some quotes from young people on this theme:

- *“Pupils who have been out of class for medical or family reasons won’t have as much work to show for estimated grades. “*
- *“My friend hasn’t been in school a lot due to medical issues. He’s not been in school so there’s not much evidence although he has been working from home a lot so it’s a concern [regarding estimate grades] for those who have high absenteeism that work from home usually and perform well in exams, but don’t have the coursework to show for it.”*

## Mental Health

Mental health was discussed in several of the focus groups as an equality impact regarding assessments and exams specifically focussing on mental health support that schools are offering linking to the wider situation with COVID-19. Concerns were raised that mental health support services for young people were limited at a time when they are crucial. In this discussion, some of the key factors contributing to poor mental health were outlined by participants. Some participants disclosed that mental health support from school had either been very limited or cut off entirely. For other participants, however, sign-posting to useful resources was a helpful stand-in for mental health support under the circumstances.

The below quotes were said in reference to young people’s experience of mental health:

- *“The mental health of young people is being affected, it’s not just about worrying about exam results, it’s the whole situation that’s going on right now. The possible loss of family and all of the external worries that people are worrying about - whether they have enough money for bills, food, job losses and the added pressure of home learning and juggling everything at the moment - there’s so much uncertainty.”*
- *“Mental health support has been cut off for me during lockdown - schools need to think about how they can provide the same level of support”*
- *“Sign posting to other resources in the meantime is useful, and those who were signed up already should get first dibs as soon as regular services can resume.”*

## Digital Exclusion

The availability of digital technology links to attainment and equal access, and specifically lack of access to digital technology was raised as a key concern by participants. The most frequently raised issue was that of whole families sharing laptops or tablets; limited technology is likely to impact the ability of certain pupils to complete work in the time frame set by a teacher. Concerns were also raised that not all pupils had access to a working printer, and therefore certain pupils spent extra time copying work out, whereas pupils with printer access could complete work more quickly and with less difficulty.

The below quotes highlight young people’s experience of digital technology:

- *“Some people are learning on their phones all day who don’t have a laptop.”*
- *“Most people I heard from did have a phone or laptop, but they might only have one laptop between the whole family. So, pupils are doing work late at night when the laptop is free.”*
- *“A big issue for my family has been the lack of a printer, Sometimes I have to copy out the work that has been given out on paper and then complete it on paper and*

*take a photo to send it back. It's the same for my younger siblings, my mum copies out their work exactly (things like drawing and spelling sheets), but it take a lot of time for my mum to do that without a printer."*

- *"If you don't have the tech to support online learning this will stop any kind of school work at home."*
- *"[There will be an equalities impact on] Any household who has more than one person learning or working from him and you only have one computer."*

## **Digital - Data and Wi-Fi**

Connectivity and data poverty were highlighted as key equality impacts for young people. Some of the examples below show the importance being placed on access to Wi-Fi to continue learning, however in practice, not all households have reliable Wi-Fi or enough bandwidth to cope with a working and learning family being online at the same time. Young people reported that a huge amount of assumptions have been made by schools that everyone has access to Wi-Fi and that is not the case - data poverty and exclusion is an important issue that young people discussed.

The below quotes were said in relation to data and Wi-Fi:

- *"Differences in broadband or digital accessibilities need to be addressed."*
- *"Wi-Fi at home isn't good, calls drop, I can't really upload things."*
- *"Most people have said they have enough [work to do] a lot of people have said that internet and Wi-Fi is an issue with some having to pay for more data to be able to participate in school."*
- *"Linking to poverty and deprivation: SIMD areas and those from disadvantaged areas who don't have access to Wi-Fi so can't get in touch with teachers or use the iPad to the full potential."*

## **Do you have views on how any potential negative impacts on particular groups of candidates could be mitigated?**

As part of the focus group question structure, facilitators asked young people how, in their opinions, the potential negative impacts on groups of candidates could be mitigated. The following headings outline some possible solutions and considerations.

### **Case by Case Assessment**

It was highlighted that SQA should aim to base assessment on individual work and individual circumstances as much as possible, and limit the influence of more general statistics such as whole-school attainment:

- *"SQA should make a deliberate effort to ask for any information from schools that might have affected a student's grades. Schools should have a clear way to make circumstances known to SQA."*
- *"Focus more on the individual learner. Awards should be assessed on a case by case basis."*
- *"Look at individual circumstances e.g. health issues - how will the SQA mitigate these circumstances."*
- *"Base grades on actual work that students have done and not numbers from multiple years ago."*

## Equal Access

The following suggestions were aimed at mitigating negative impact on those with limited access to spaces and resources at home:

- *“Equalities going forward must be a focus, making sure each learner is equal and has equal access.”*
- *“There are Hubs for key worker children, why not create hubs or opportunity for those who face inequality to get extra support?”*

## National Approach

It was raised that there were discrepancies in workload and approach to learning in different schools, across different parts of Scotland. It was suggested that a national standard of workload and national approach to work might mitigate the impact of this:

- *“The work set in schools should be nationalised so that there aren’t discrepancies in workload.”*
- *“Have the same approach to online learning, teachers having guidance for grading coursework and online learning”*

## Digital Inequalities

The following ideas relate to the mitigation of digital inequalities, by identifying and responding to the needs of young people with less access to WIFI and tech:

- *“As lockdown started, my school did a survey to find out who had WIFI and tech, and distributed things according to need.”*
- *“Scottish Government should be looking at ways of 4G and 3G connectivity and providing devices, dongles and WIFI to those who can’t get online.”*
- *“Learners who make use of a support for learning or special needs, special schools or they might not have access to software etc. This shouldn’t disadvantage them.”*

## Mental Health

Some of the young people were satisfied with sign-posting services for pupils who needed mental health support at home. Others, however, suggested that schools could be more forthcoming with mental health support for students at home. The following suggestions were made in reference to mitigating mental health concerns:

- *“My school sent out a wellbeing pack to support pupils, including activities that pupils can do surrounding mindfulness or taking care of themselves.”*
- *“Our school had our careers advisor and also our Pastoral Care Teacher phone round the pupils to check up on them and their studies.”*
- *“My school has checked in with parents and carers to make sure pupils’ wellbeing is ok.”*
- *“In my experience, some teachers are doing consultations with pupils about how they are feeling, how they are learning and how they are finding learning at home.”*

## Appeal Process

It was suggested that an appeal process which allows grades to go down might be off-putting for young people who might avoid the process altogether. This could be a barrier to young people who may otherwise have appealed with success.

- *“Appeal process should not allow for grades to go down.”*
- *“If your grade can go down, you might be put off from appealing at all.”*

## Specific Groups of People who might face significant inequalities

During discussions, a number of different groups of people were identified as those who should have been taken in to consideration during an equalities impact assessment.

### Young Carers

Young carers were continuously raised as a group who may be more likely to face inequality by forced home learning. It was raised that, those who have caring responsibilities at home will find it more difficult to get work done than they would in a school environment.

- *“Young people who have been out of class for caring responsibility will not have as much to show for estimated grades.”*
- *“Those with caring responsibilities should be taken in to account.”*
- *“Young Carers especially [impacted by equalities], [as] working at home will be stressful for young carers. Also estimates, young carers might not have been at school as much.”*
- *“It’s a bit more than just deprived communities. Consideration should also be given to those who have at home responsibilities. i.e. young carers or those in a chaotic home. Pupils should be highlighted as a young carer for example and this to be taken in to account to your grade.”*
- *“The same consideration should be given to young carers, similar to those who are ill on exam day or suffer a bereavement.”*

### Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES)

One participant raised young people with adverse childhood experiences as a potential group that may be particularly impacted with a lack of school support.

- *“Any kids that have experience any kind of Adverse Childhood Experiences.”*

### Shielding population/Those who have suffered loss/illness from COVID

Concerns were raised around the impact on those who had faced direct loss or suffering as a result of COVID-19, which is likely to have impacted their ability to focus on education. Additionally, it was raised that those shielding were unable to take breaks outside, which may adversely affect mental health and/or learning capacity.

- *“Shielding people need to be taken in to account. Those who are shielding and those who have family members who are shielding. The mental health impact is*

*going to take effect on attainment, as they've not had the same ability to be able to go outside."*

- *"People that can be affected family members that have had COVID 19 or have died of COVID."*

## **Young Homeless People**

- *"Young people who are experiencing homelessness and young people who have problems at home not be able to do the work and teachers might not be able to give them the right support or be aware of what the issues are."*

## **Additional Support Needs/Learning Support/Learners with Disabilities**

The topics of young people who access additional support during exams and learners with disabilities were constant areas of concern during all of the focus groups.

- *"Support has been very varied across the board to those who receive extra support at exam times/in class."*
- *"Those with additional support needs not having the right support to ask questions and have things clarified - not having at teacher at the moment is quite difficult."*
- *"A lot of my friends have additional support needs which can't be accommodated for home learning at the moment. This has been a big issue for them moving on to new subjects, next year, perhaps at the next qualification up from where they're at just now if they aren't getting the grades this year. They would have support in the exam itself and because they didn't sit the exam, the support has disappeared."*
- *"Young people with ME and chronic fatigue syndrome [usually] have a very high absentee rate at school. Having the option to learn remotely might help with their attainment and what they miss [in school]."*
- *"Pupils with additional support needs - [teachers will face a] huge struggle to estimate and compare students with ASN. The support and access isn't the same as in school as working from home."*
- *"The new way of marking things is a bit confusing and it might have a different impact on young people with additional support needs, with no provision for extra time."*

## **ESOL (English as a second language)**

One participant highlighted that English wasn't their first language and they haven't had the usual support or contact from support department at school.

- *"during the exams period, they've always been supportive, but at the moment, there's not much support and I have a feeling that I won't do as well."*

## Theme 4 - SQAs future approach to assessment and accreditation

### Challenges of a digital assessment model:

#### Equalities

Alongside digital inequality and access to resources, it was raised that young people with additional support needs would be among the most unfairly impacted if home learning would be part of the assessment model in future.

Participants gave some examples of this in the direct quotes below:

- *“Additional support is a huge issue with supporting young people with learning disabilities and other additional support needs. It’s not working at the moment.”*
- *“Not everyone has good access to the internet (like rural areas). This is a huge challenge to learning online and any testing online. Other people are on our WiFi at home too; if parents are on meetings or my brother is doing an online class, the internet goes so slow. This can increase the attainment gap and disproportionality effect people.”*
- *“School is a place for people to go to gain equal opportunities, everyone has the same access to equipment and opportunity. If you take the place (school buildings) away, it defeats the purpose of the leveller that schools provide to young people.”*

#### Adapting to a Home Environment

Participants were concerned about distractions at home, and difficulties with separating space to relax with spaces to work. Concerns were also raised about motivation and pupil apathy at home.

The young people as part of the focus group spoke about this below:

- *“Distractions at home make things difficult, sharing bedrooms share surroundings with others. School says we shouldn’t confuse learning and relaxing areas, but I only have my bedroom.”*
- *“Mindset at home is very different from at school: it’s much harder to be motivated when you aren’t in a learning environment.”*
- *“Overall, the biggest challenge with a blended approach is challenging pupil apathy, those putting in the effort and going the extra mile should be rewarded.”*
- *“Online doesn’t replace physical classroom or the interaction of someone speaking to you in person and it doesn’t replicate well to online.”*
- *“Sitting exams at home would be difficult as you’re not in that mind-set. But every household is different, abuse victims no household is the same and the environment is different.”*
- *“Conversation is really important. Loads of ideas to be shared between learner and teacher.”*

## Adapting to digital learning

Some participants were concerned that practical subjects would suffer more than others in a digital assessment model. It was also raised that learning techniques that students had developed over the years would now be less useful, and new methods and techniques would need to be learned to adapt to digital assessment.

- *“A lot of subjects don’t work online. The learning process doesn’t work let alone the exam. You’d have to overhaul the curriculum. Music, drama, home economics, mod languages...”*
- *“If you don’t have the tech to support online leaning so this will stop any kind of online learning.”*
- *“It will be hard to move to open book, you need to learn different skills. A lot of the skills and revision techniques has been memorisation based and I’m going to regurgitate this.”*

## Responding to new difficulties

Learners may run into difficulties, such as digital and tech issues, which schools would need new protocol to respond to. There may also need to be new protocol in place to address cheating in home exam environments.

- *“If things are unreliable, for example, if Wi-Fi drops, there could be issues in proving that this has happened”*
- *“Online exams are a good idea. But there would need to be something that would stop people cheating or opening books.”*

## Opportunities of a Digital Assessment Model:

### Moving away from rote learning

Many participants raised the idea that this is an opportunity to change the normal assessment model for the better. It was raised in all focus groups that closed-book exam-based assessment was not preferable for every subject, and that assessment throughout the year and open-book exams might allow learners to apply knowledge in a way that is more aligned with daily life and future employment situations.

- *“Open book exams would be a possibility - it makes more sense. For example, in English, remembering quotes about a book that you don’t have in front of you. You have to memorise assignments and write it back out timed. It doesn’t really make sense to regurgitate information.”*
- *“It doesn’t help your learning to be able to re write memorised essays.”*
- *“This could be a change to change the exam model to a fairer examination of skills and continuous assessment or more open book. A lot of the exam structure how it is mainly exam conditions. More open book learning to show what people can do.”*
- *“This is an amazing opportunity to re-examine how exams are in their current form.”*
- *“Mark assignments that we do throughout the year.”*
- *“Open book exams. Think about circumstances [when assessing learners]”*



- *“Different methods with teachers and schools to engage with pupils online. Not just, reading a workbook and doing some exercises. We need more teacher interaction and teaching online.”*
- *“Move away from intelligence is remembering things rather than the application of learning.”*
- *“This would be a good opportunity for work to matter for the whole year rather than just one exam. Their learning style isn’t exam based. Exams reward those who can memorise.”*
- *“Less focus on exams going forward, radically overhaul exams if not cancel exams for next year also. If exams go ahead normally, it wouldn’t be fair - we’ve missed out on a year of learning.”*
- *“Continuous assessment would be a much better way forward.”*
- *“If a blended model is to be the norm going forward, the senior pupils are going to need time in school to get practical elements of the course at school then the theory at home. However, young people need to be consulted with this as it would be a huge overhaul of the education system.”*

## **Addressing existing inequalities**

It was also raised that, learning in school presented difficulties for some learners, and that a blended approach may be a preferable model for young people with different circumstances.

- *“Young people with a disability like ME and chronic fatigue syndrome have the highest absentee rate at school. Having an option to learn remotely might help with absenteeism. Hybrid learning would be ideal.”*

## **How can you see a ‘blended approach’ model working - what ideas do you have?**

### **Getting information to learners as early as possible**

The topics of transparency and clarity were raised in all four focus groups. Whilst participants understood the complicated nature of the situation, many felt that they needed information on changes to learning as quickly as possible moving forward. It was also raised that consultation with learners and other stakeholders is an effective way of responding well to their needs and concerns.

- *“A lot of young people haven’t been given information about how the grades are being allocated. Much more information needs to be given directly to learners. Like the government advice. There’s so many rumours going around and things keep changing.”*
- *“Being prepared for the year ahead is the best way forward. A final decision needs to be taken and young people informed.”*
- *“This kind of approach is the best way forward. Consulting with learners along with teachers and parents.”*

## **National approach**

Linked to the topic of clarity, it was raised in all focus groups that a standardised, consistent approach to learning across Scotland would be preferable to a localised approach, or an approach that allows individual schools to assess learners differently.

- *“National approach to blended learning must take place. We are worried that some schools might take or give priority to certain subjects rather than the wider curriculum.”*
- *“Whatever we do, it needs to be more consistent across areas and councils so that the attainment gap doesn’t widen: schools are taking totally different approaches which disadvantages some pupils and advantages others.”*
- *“Standardise assessment so that everyone is doing the same work or similar so it’s easier to grade nationally.”*

## Structure

Some participants felt that a timetabled, structured day would be preferable to tasks with no set time frame in the day. However, it was also raised that that may not be helpful or manageable for everyone, for example, young people with caring responsibilities at home. Participants also suggested that learning hubs should be set up in different venues, such as community libraries, to give some structure to learners who aren’t in class every day in a blended-learning model.

- *“Ideally students would be back in schools or learning hubs full time as soon as possible.”*
- *“We have key worker hubs, how about a key education hub.”*
- *“Timetabled online lessons to give pupils structure.”*
- *“However, a structured timetable might not work so well for everyone: a person-centred approach is necessary, there’s no one-size-fits-all approach. The approach going forward needs to be as tailored to individuals as possible.”*
- *“Can teachers have ‘office hours’ where pupils could get 1:1 time with them?”*
- *“Being clear about what is optional and what is not for home learning. A sense of where I am in comparison with peers - peer support. Just look over no one else is on the section.”*
- *“When working from home some stuff feels optional. It would encourage home learning more if they knew it was going to contribute to their grade. Home environment can be reflected in exam results. This is an opportunity”*
- *“Making sure lessons are actually taught and uploaded, rather than just being handed work, so that pupils have a set number of things to do/engage with during the day.”*

## Continuous assessment

Participants raised that exams weren’t considered an ideal assessment model by many learners already, and this might be the right time to move to a continuous assessment model for more subjects. Participants agreed that coursework throughout the year would help to relieve exam stress, and would be more reflective of a learners’ understanding of a subject.

- *“There should be coursework across the board to blend your work to aggregate your grade. For example, for music, 50% of the grade is the exam and 50% is other work, the exam isn’t the whole grade.”*
- *“Fairness must come first, needs to be based on external marks, not necessarily exams. A blended of course marks and other types of assessment.”*
- *“This year/next year to focus more on portfolio, coursework and be innovative with subjects that are 100% exams. Informal/regular assessment to be worth more and exams worth less in terms of weighting.”*
- *“Exams have never been 100% fair, everything is based on one performance, if you have a bad day, that’s it over and you feel as if that’s the end. It would be a real improvement to take away that stress.”*
- *“If this is to work at all- SQA need to (re)introduce unit assessments and coursework/dissertations to be marked by SQA markers, avoid teacher bias or historic ways of attainment.”*
- *“I would say that it would be better if it could be done in the easiest (simplest) way for learners. SQA should take into consideration personal circumstances. People react differently to exams and we are realising it’s not right for everyone and this needs to change.”*

## Participant Profile

Across the four sessions, 32 young people attended the focus groups. All participants were between the ages of 14 - 25, and represented 26 constituencies in 19 local authority areas across Scotland, as well as 3 national voluntary youth work organisations. The majority of participants were of secondary school age or had recently left school. Some participants were outside of school age, however were representing the views of their constituents.

**The following 26 constituency areas were represented by 27 young people:**

- Airdrie and Shotts
- Banffshire and Buchan Coast
- Caithness Sutherland and Ross
- Carrick Cumnock and Doon Valley
- Cunninghame South
- Dumbarton
- Dumfriesshire
- Dundee West
- Dunfermline
- Eastwood (Represented by 2 MSYPs)
- Edinburgh Central
- Edinburgh Pentlands
- Galloway and West Dumfries
- Glasgow Cathcart
- Glasgow Southside
- Inverclyde
- Kilmarnock and Irvine Valley
- Midlothian North and Musselburgh
- Midlothian South Tweeddale and Lauderdale
- Motherwell and Wishaw
- Orkney Islands
- Perthshire South and Kinross-shire
- Renfrewshire North
- Renfrewshire South
- Rutherglen
- Shetland Islands

**The following national voluntary organisations were represented by 5 young people:**

- Scouts Scotland (Represented by 2 MSYPS)
- Girlguiding Scotland (Represented by 2 MSYPS)
- LGBT Youth Scotland

**This report was written by the Scottish Youth Parliament for the Scottish Qualifications Authority. For more information please contact:**

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