

Agenda Item	5.
Report No	EDU 15/20

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Education

Date: 30 September 2020

Report Title: SQA Attainment Update

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Education and Learning

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide elected Members with an update on Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) course attainment in secondary schools in The Highland Council. The paper provides information about the SQA's approach to awarding grades in session 2019/20 and the decision made by the Scottish Government to overturn the SQA's moderation process and to award grades as estimated by classroom teachers in schools. The paper further provides an indication of the plans for consideration of school-level SQA course attainment at relevant Ward Meetings.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. note the contents of the paper and recognise the significant improvement trends in attainment in S4, S5 and S6;
- ii. formally congratulate the young people, their families and the school staff for such significant improvement in SQA attainment in the Highlands in August 2020; and
- iii. agree that following individual school attainment reviews a report will be brought back to the Education Committee highlighting best practice in closing the attainment gap in schools and reporting on the key strategies being deployed to further improve work in this area.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource: The paper was informed by the priorities within the corporate plan.

3.2 Legal: There are no legal implications contained within the contents of this report.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Planned improvements and the

highlighting of good practice will support better outcomes and take cognisance of the specific challenges related to equality, poverty and rurality.

- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever: There are no climate change issues arising from this report.
- 3.5 Risk: Reputational risk should schools in the Highlands' attainment not continue to improve and progress into the second quartile.
- 3.6 Gaelic :The delivery of better outcomes will build on the recent SQA success of our young people undertaking GME and GLE course work and courses

4. Overview

- 4.1 On 12 March 2020, SQA issued a statement to schools alerting schools to the possibility of the coronavirus on the 2020 diet of examinations. Teaching staff were asked to focus on gathering evidence to inform estimates in the normal way to support any consideration of exceptional circumstances. On 18 March, the SQA issued a further statement, reiterating the intention to run the full diet of examinations, while acknowledging the system-wide risk to the delivery of these exams. Advice about the preparation of estimates remained unchanged. On 19 March, following a statement by the Deputy First Minister (DFM), Mr John Swinney in parliament on the same date, an SQA statement confirmed that the examination diet would not now take place and that an alternative certification model would be put in place.
- 4.2 On 20 March the DFM announced the closure of schools with effect from 23 March. On 22 March SQA issued a statement advising schools that no young person should attend school to complete coursework. This was followed up by a statement on 24 March indicating the schools should not submit any further coursework in Higher and Advanced Higher courses, and that already submitted National 5 coursework would not be submitted to markers for marking. Instead, all such coursework would be used by classroom teachers to inform the updated estimate process, with further guidance on this to follow.
- 4.3 On 2 April, advice about the new estimate process was issued by SQA, asking teachers to provide estimates based on “demonstrated and inferred attainment”. The SQA defined an estimate as “a judgement of a grade and band based on a holistic review of a learner’s performance in the assessment evidence available.” Teachers were asked to provide details of where each candidate in each course should be placed in a number of bands and “refined bands” within each overall grade, and to rank candidates within each refined band. To allow time for this task to be completed, the deadline for estimate submission was extended from 24 April to 29 May. In line with other authorities, the decision was taken not to share estimates at this stage with candidates as SQA had not shared the moderation process and the sharing of estimates would have been potentially misleading (this was borne out by the results issued on 4 August – see Section 5 below). In effect the process of devising estimates and rankings, the application of the SQA’s moderation process and the final awarding of grades replaced the usual examination and marking process, which is conducted separately, with the final grades being shared on results day.
- 4.4 The statement of 2 April stated that submitted estimates and rankings would be the “core element” in awarding grades, and the SQA would “adjust estimates, where

necessary, to ensure consistency both across the country and in comparison with previous years.” This would be completed through a moderation process, the details of which were not released until results day (4 August).

- 4.5 Officers of the Highland Council provided support documentation and guidance to schools to assist with the process of producing estimates, including historic attainment and estimate data for the preceding four years. All Highland secondary schools submitted all of their estimates and rankings by the SQA deadline, following a quality assurance process in each school that involved Principal Teachers/Faculty Heads and Senior Management Teams. All estimates and rankings were signed off by the Head Teacher of the school, confirming their validity.
- 4.6 Candidates received their results on 4 August, and an appeal process was put in place for schools to challenge moderated grades that were lower than the original estimate by providing evidence to support the original teacher estimate. On 11 August, however, the DFM announced that the moderation process used by SQA would no longer be the determinant of candidate grades and that, instead, the originally estimated grades submitted would be accepted as definitive, except where the moderation process had led to a candidate’s grade being improved from the teacher estimates, in which case candidates would retain that improved grade. The appeals process, therefore, no longer applied, though in some very exceptional circumstances schools could submit a revised estimate to SQA if it was found that an error had been made in data submission.

5. Initial Results

- 5.1 The initial run of results showed that the SQA’s moderation process had led to many changes to the estimates submitted by teachers. There were many instances where a change to a band did not affect a candidate’s overall grade (for example where a B, band 3, was adjusted to a B, band 4). However, there were more than 5000 instances across Highland schools where a candidate’s estimated grade (i.e. A, B, C or D) was lowered by the SQA moderation process. There were more than 3000 such cases in National 5 presentations, just under 2000 in Higher presentations and over 150 in Advanced Higher presentations. All Highland secondary schools had instances of grades being lowered.
- 5.2 Much of the national coverage of the results as announced on 4 August centred on the extent to which the SQA’s moderation process was thought to impact especially on pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. In Highland, analysis of the impact of the downgrading of estimates showed that there was no significant correlation between the percentage of downgrades and a school’s rurality, size, levels of previous attainment or an indication of improvement over four years. However, there was found to be a moderate correlation of 0.45 between the percentage of downgrades in our Highland schools and the extent to which each school is affected by deprivation within the school community. The implication of this is that, while the statistical significance is not strong, some of our pupils most affected by deprivation were also most affected by the downgrade of estimates.
- 5.3 The vast majority of grade changes were downgrades from the estimate (24.2% of all estimates), which indicates the way that the SQA’s moderation process attempted to create grade patterns in line with previous years. Where this happened the professional judgement of teachers was disregarded in favour of the application of a statistical process (and teacher judgements were to have been taken into account in the appeals process). Nearly 500 individual grades were increased by the SQA

moderation process, and, as noted above, these increased grades are retained by the candidates now that the moderation process has been annulled. Again, the moderation process increased grades with no consideration of teacher judgement, and this was done to create grade distribution patterns that were similar to previous years. In total, therefore, 27.7% of grade estimates were changed by the SQA's moderation process, compared to 26.2% nationally.

- 5.4 The initial appeals process would have represented a considerable task for classroom teachers, Principal Teachers/Faculty Heads and Senior Management Teams in terms of assembling the relevant evidence, providing commentaries to explain increased attainment in many cases, and quality assuring the whole process culminating in the Head Teacher in each school signing off each appeal. A survey of school staff about the SQA's processes in session 2019/20 indicated that 64% of respondents felt that this workload would not have been manageable. There is therefore some relief in schools that the decision has been made to revert to estimates, with 78% of survey respondents indicating that they agreed with that decision. The full survey results are available as Appendix 1 to this paper. The survey responses indicate very clearly the professionalism and rigour with which staff complied with the shift to an estimates-based accreditation system, while at the same time reflecting the disappointment that the SQA's moderation process appeared not to respect their professional judgement. The findings in this survey will feed into the national review of this year's accreditation process, being carried out by Professor Mark Priestley of Stirling University.
- 5.5 Despite the workload implications of the appeals process, staff in schools were prepared and focused on assembling the necessary evidence and commentaries, as an effective appeals process was a necessary adjunct to the SQA moderation process. Following the robust quality assurance processes undertaken in schools during the production of the estimates, staff and senior management were confident that the estimates submitted were accurate and justified by the evidence of demonstrated and inferred attainment that had been taken into account by class teachers, and that therefore the estimates submitted represented grades that accurately reflected the knowledge and understanding of young people.

6. Initial data analysis – 4 August

- 6.1 Despite the large number of downgrades created by the SQA's initial moderation process (nearly a quarter of all grades awarded were downgraded from the estimate), the first run of results showed increases in attainment in Highland and nationally.
- 6.2 Across Highland, 49.5% of S4 students achieved five or more National 5 awards (up from 46.2% in 2019), and 22.2% of S5 students achieved 5 or more Highers (up from 21.9% in 2019). In S6, 38.3% of candidates achieved at least one award at Advanced Higher, up 1.2% on 2019. These figures showed an improvement from last year and across a five-year trend. Even before the decision was made to revert to estimates, the SQA results in Highland showed a significant upward movement.
- 6.3 In terms of literacy and numeracy there were also improvements in the figures. Before taking into account pupils who achieved freestanding units, 70.6% of S4 pupils achieved Level 5 literacy, an increase of 4% on the four-year average, and 60.4% of S5 pupils achieved Level 6 literacy, up by 9.6% on the four-year average. In numeracy, 41.7% of S4 pupils achieved Level 5 (up 1.6% on the four-year average) and 28.1% of S5 pupils achieved Level 6 (up 3.5% on the four-year

average). Again these figures demonstrated significant improvement, due to the hard work of young people and staff. Further upward adjustments to these figures will be seen when freestanding unit results are added in due course.

6.4 In terms of A-C pass rates, the initial Highland figure was 84.4% for Nat 5 in S4 (compared to the national figure of 81.1%), 82.2% at Higher in S5 (compared to the national figure of 78.9%) and 85.9% at Advanced Higher in S6 (compared to the national figure of 84.9%). These figures showed an improvement in Highland of 2.0% at National 5, 3.7% at Higher and 7.6% at Advanced Higher. These figures showed significant improvements, and improvement at a level that was better than the national level of improvement as announced on 4 August.

6.5 Overall, 95.4% of S4 National 5 entries led to an award at A-D, up from 93.5% in 2019. 95.4% of S5 Higher entries led to an award, up from 93.1% in 2019. In S6, 93.7% of all Advanced Higher entries led to an award, up from 86.3% in 2019. 33% of entries across all levels led to an award at “A”, compared to 30% in 2019. Once again, these figures showed significant improvement, reflecting the hard work carried out by staff and learners throughout the session.

7. Data analysis following the annulment of SQA’s moderation process

7.1 Clearly the effect of reverting to teacher estimates has had a significant impact on overall attainment levels across Highland. There were also improvements to be seen for young people in SIMD Deciles 1-2, that is, those young people who are most affected by socio-economic deprivation.

7.2 Our initial analysis of the revised (post-11 August) attainment data shows the following changes (note that the interim figures do not include free-standing units, wider achievement awards or college courses):

Key measure	2019 attainment	4 August 2020 attainment	Revised attainment
S4 with 5+ awards at level 5	46.2%	49.5%	52.1%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with 5+ awards at level 5	27.5%	29.9%	32.7%
S5 with 3+ awards at level 6	51.8%	52.6%	55.2%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with 3+ awards at level 6	31.4%	30.6%	33.3%
S5 with 5+ awards at level 6	21.9%	22.2%	23.5%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with 5+ awards at level 6	8.3%	9.38%	10.5%
S6 with 1+ awards at level 7	37.1%	38.3%	39.2%
SIMD 1-2 S6 with 1+ awards at level 7	12.5%	16.3%	20.8%
S4 with level 5 literacy	69.9%	70.6%	71.6%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with level 5 literacy	56.1%	56.7%	58.4%
S4 with level 5 numeracy	41.8%	41.7%	44.5%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with level 5 numeracy	24.0%	22.1%	25.2%
S5 with level 6 literacy	58.9%	60.4%	63.0%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with level 6 literacy	41.3%	40.7%	45.1%
S5 with level 6 numeracy	27.9%	28.1%	29.2%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with level 6 numeracy	19.8%	13.6%	14.4%

Key measure	2019 attainment	4 August 2020 attainment	Revised attainment
S4 National 5 A-C pass rates	82.5%	84.4%	91.9%
SIMD 1-2 S4 National 5 A-C pass rates	75.5%	79.6%	91.1%
S4 National 5 awards at A	37.8%	37.8%	45.4%
SIMD 1-2 S4 National 5 awards at A	24.5%	29.7%	35.7%
S5 Higher A-C pass rates	78.5%	82.2%	91.3%
SIMD 1-2 S5 Higher A-C pass rates	73.5%	76.6%	88.6%
S5 Higher awards at A	30.3%	32.6%	42.3%
SIMD 1-2 S5 Higher awards at A	16.8%	28.1%	37.0%
S6 Advanced Higher A-C pass rates	78.3%	85.9%	91.4%
SIMD 1-2 S6 Advanced Higher A-C pass rates	53.8%	73.9%	87.0%
S6 Advanced Higher awards at A	26.0%	35.8%	42.4%
SIMD 1-2 S6 Advanced Higher awards at A	7.7%	21.7%	21.7%
National 5 A-D pass rates (all stages)	90.9%	93.6%	97.1%
SIMD 1-2 National 5 A-D pass rates (all stages)	87.2%	91.7%	97.4%
Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	91.1%	94.9%	97.7%
SIMD 1-2 Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	85.8%	93.7%	96.8%
Advanced Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	86.5%	94.6%	97.2%
SIMD 1-2 Advanced Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	61.5%	82.6%	100%

7.3 National post-11 August data has been published by SQA on overall course attainment at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher and the following table shows how Highland data compares to these national statistics (changes from 2019 indicated in brackets).

Measure	National	Highland
Nat 5 A-C (all candidates)	89.0% (+10.8%)	89.7% (+11.3%)
Higher A-C (all candidates)	89.3% (+14.5%)	90.8% (+15.8%)
Advanced Higher A-C (all candidates)	93.1% (+13.7%)	91.7% (+13.1%)

7.4 The first table indicates further improvement (when compared to the 4 August data) to each measure for whole cohorts, and for all but one of the measures for candidates in SIMD 1-2. There is one anomaly, where the 2020 percentage of candidates in SIMD 1-2 achieving Level 6 numeracy in S5 is lower than the 2019 figure. Comparisons with the national A-C figures show Highland to be ahead of the pass rates for National 5 and Higher when considering the results of candidates from all year groups, and the improvement in Highland is greater than the improvement nationally (especially in Higher). Advanced Higher is the exception, where, despite an increase on performance this year, the Highland pass rate is still 1.4% behind the national pass rate.

8. Deprivation-linked attainment gap

8.1 While the overall attainment data showed gains for young people in SIMD Deciles 1-2 it is also important to explore how the post-11 August data affects our deprivation-linked attainment gap (that is, the gap between the attainment of young people in SIMD Deciles 1-2 and those in SIMD Deciles 9-10). The following table shows the attainment gap between those candidates most affected by deprivation and those candidates least affected by deprivation.

Key measure	2019 attainment	2020 revised attainment	Gap 2019/ Gap 2020
SIMD 9-10 S4 with 5+ awards at level 5	63.8%	79.1%	36.3%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with 5+ awards at level 5	27.5%	32.7%	46.4%
SIMD 9-10 S5 with 3+ awards at level 6	65.7%	75.6%	34.3%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with 3+ awards at level 6	31.4%	33.3%	42.3%
SIMD 9-10 S5 with 5+ awards at level 6	32.4%	35.4%	24.1%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with 5+ awards at level 6	8.3%	10.5%	24.9%
SIMD 9-10 S6 with 1+ awards at level 7	46.1%	52.3%	33.6%
SIMD 1-2 S6 with 1+ awards at level 7	12.5%	20.8%	31.5%
SIMD 9-10 S4 with level 5 literacy	79.0%	87.9%	22.9%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with level 5 literacy	56.1%	58.4%	29.5%
SIMD 9-10 S4 with level 5 numeracy	53.1%	59.9%	29.1%
SIMD 1-2 S4 with level 5 numeracy	24.0%	25.2%	24.7%
SIMD 9-10 S5 with level 6 literacy	71.4%	73.2%	30.1%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with level 6 literacy	41.3%	45.1%	28.1%
SIMD 9-10 S5 with level 6 numeracy	31.9%	39.4%	12.1%
SIMD 1-2 S5 with level 6 numeracy	19.8%	14.4%	25.4%
SIMD 9-10 S4 National 5 A-C pass rates	85.4%	93.3%	9.9%
SIMD 1-2 S4 National 5 A-C pass rates	75.5%	91.1%	2.2%
SIMD 9-10 S4 National 5 awards at A	41.5%	49.9%	17.0%
SIMD 1-2 S4 National 5 awards at A	24.5%	35.7%	14.2%
SIMD 9-10 S5 Higher A-C pass rates	80.4%	90.8%	6.9%
SIMD 1-2 S5 Higher A-C pass rates	73.5%	88.6%	2.2%
SIMD 9-10 S5 Higher awards at A	32.4%	46.1%	15.6%
SIMD 1-2 S5 Higher awards at A	16.8%	37.0%	9.1%
SIMD 9-10 S6 Advanced Higher A-C pass rates	73.4%	93.5%	19.6%
SIMD 1-2 S6 Advanced Higher A-C pass rates	53.8%	87.0%	6.5%
SIMD 9-10 S6 Advanced Higher awards at A	21.6%	40.2%	13.9%
SIMD 1-2 S6 Advanced Higher awards at A	7.7%	21.7%	18.5%
SIMD 9-10 National 5 A-D pass rates (all stages)	91.3%	97.8%	4.1%
SIMD 1-2 National 5 A-D pass rates (all stages)	87.2%	97.4%	0.4%
SIMD 9-10 Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	92.5%	98.3%	6.7%
SIMD 1-2 Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	85.8%	96.8%	1.5%

Key measure	2019 attainment	2020 revised attainment	Gap 2019/ Gap 2020
stages)			
SIMD 9-10 Advanced Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	83.5%	97.8%	22.0%
SIMD 1-2 Advanced Higher A-D pass rates (all stages)	61.5%	100.0%	-2.2%

8.2 In of these 11 of these 17 measures, the attainment gap between the candidates affected most and least by deprivation has narrowed and in 6 it has widened. It will be important for analysis at school level to establish patterns in individual establishments which will help to explain this. Following attainment reviews with individual schools, analysis of effective practice that has reduced the attainment gap, and consideration of factors that may have led to widened gaps, a further report to the Education Committee will allow additional scrutiny of this data.

9. Next Steps

9.1 National benchmarking data (other Local Authorities)

9.1.1 The Scottish Government's online benchmarking tool *Insight* has not yet gone live and therefore comparisons between Highland SQA attainment data and that of other authorities and certain national measures is not yet possible. However, SQA announced that approximately 125,000 grades would have been eligible for appeal, of which just over 4% would have come from Highland. Highland secondary schools have just over 4% of the secondary school population in Scotland. This would suggest that the impact on Highland results of the decision to revert to estimates will be largely in line with the impact across the country as a whole (though individual authorities may well vary in the percentage of upgrades to their results).

9.1.2 It is proposed that a further paper for the Education Committee be presented when this is possible, and again later in the school session when *Insight* is updated to give full information about all school leavers, with further analysis of the deprivation-linked attainment gap.

9.2 Improving attainment

9.2.1 During session 2019/20, prior to lockdown, the Education Improvement Team were involved in support and challenge attainment meetings with all secondary Head Teachers, leading to target setting activity against the key "breadth and depth" measures of attainment. All EIT members were given peer training to support consistent attainment challenge questions. Members of the EIT, the Strategic Chair and the Opposition Lead for Education will participate in *Insight* training during the September in-service to further enhance capacity for scrutiny and support to schools. This process will continue during session 2020/21. A key area of exploration with each school will be the relationship between targeted improvement in attainment in the Broad General Education (S1-S3) and progression into the Senior Phase (S4-S6).

9.2.2 Key to improvement planning will be the identification of any new attainment gaps which have been created by a term of online learning. The data at paragraph 8.1 above suggests that there is further exploration required of the reasons for the variations of the extent to which the attainment gap has narrowed or widened as the result of this year's processes and it will be important that schools have strategies to ensure that where gains have been identified they are not lost during the current

session. As mentioned above, a further report to committee will allow further discussion of interventions to close the attainment gap, which will cover, for instance, learning and teaching approaches, support strategies, presentation policies and the use of tracking and monitoring.

9.3 **Individual school SQA attainment data at ward level**

The proposal is that the most effective and useful way to report to Members about attainment in individual secondary schools would be to do so at Ward meetings. In this way Members would be able to consider the specific attainment data relating to their local schools. Prior to each meeting Members would be supplied with summary data covering the key measures in the table above and this data would underpin the discussion. We still need to add what this will look like for Members please

9.4 **Scottish Government *Insight* benchmarking tool kit**

As mentioned above, the updated *Insight* toolkit will help with analysis of attainment patterns in individual schools and across the authority as a whole. A training session for all members of the Education Improvement Team was arranged for 15 September with an *Insight* Professional Advisor and this fed in to Member workshops on the 17 September when Members experienced how the *Insight* tool is used to inform discussions with schools about raising attainment. **Appendix 2** gives a list of dates and times.

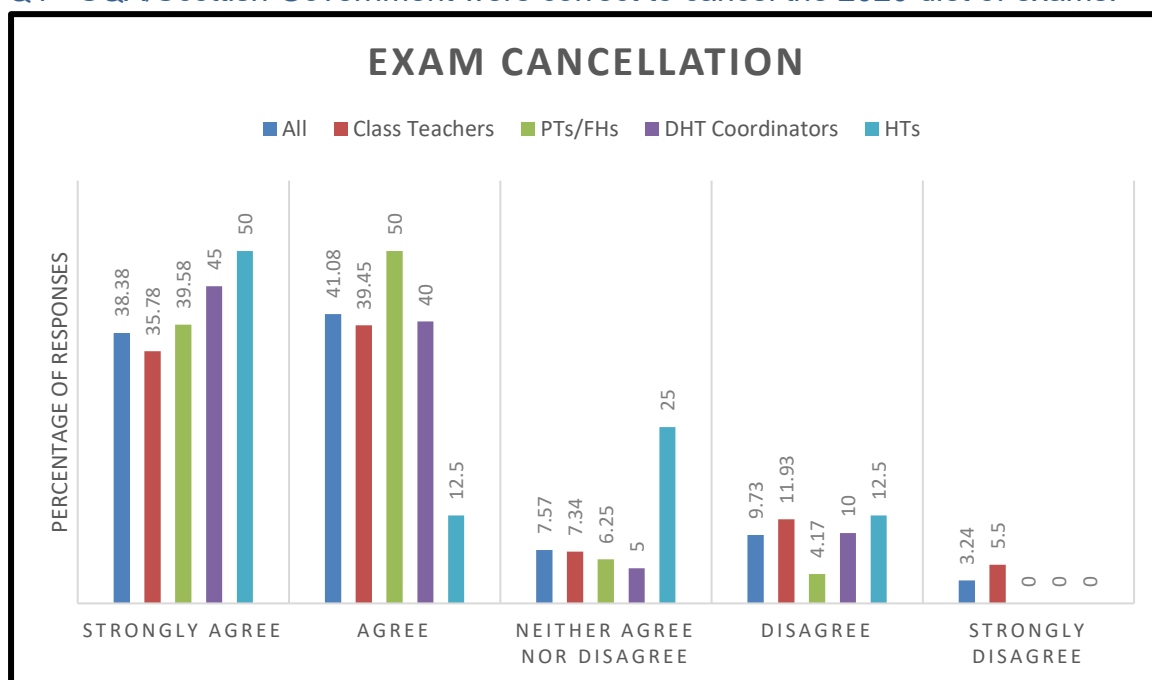
Designation: Executive Chief Officer – Education

Date: 7 September 2020

Author: Donald Paterson – EIT Leadership Lead

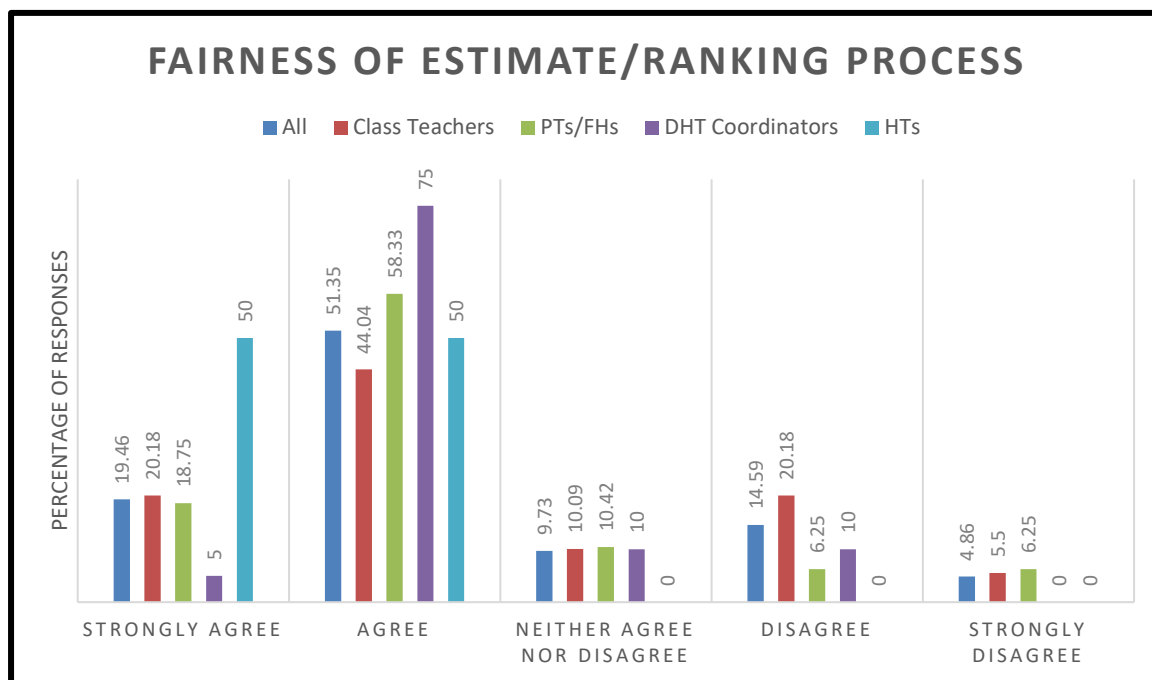
APPENDIX 1 – Survey of school staff on SQA processes 2019/20

Q1 - SQA/Scottish Government were correct to cancel the 2020 diet of exams.



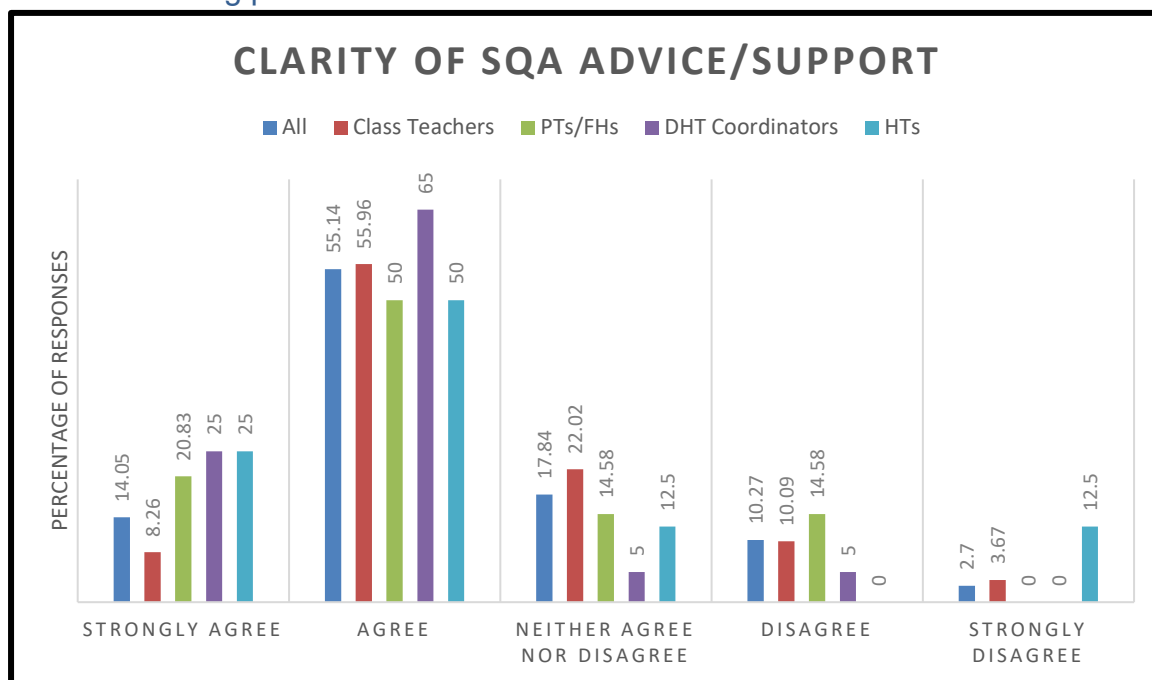
The responses here show that there was broad agreement with the decision to cancel exams this year, though it is worth pointing out a minority view that it might have been possible to run the exams in a safe way in smaller schools. Some alternative suggestions, such as later exams, online examination, or consideration of already submitted material for assessment were made. The survey was carried out after the event, of course, so issues that might not have been apparent at the point of school closure are clearer to see now. In particular, some of the comments in the survey indicated that some pupils have missed out on the kind of improvement that is sometimes seen with candidates in the final few weeks of their courses. By and large, the comments on this question indicate agreement with the decision under the circumstances on the grounds of safety. However, it is worth noting that a significant minority (13% approximately) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the decision to cancel the examinations. Moving forwards, it will be important for the 2020 examination diet to consider all of the possibilities with the greater preparation time that is available, including the possibility of delaying rather than cancelling exams (mentioned in several responses received). The comments in the Appendix show a willingness of staff in Highland schools to consider and engage with alternative approaches that might be possibilities for the 2020 diet.

Q2 - The process of providing estimates and rankings provided a fair alternative to the cancelled exams.



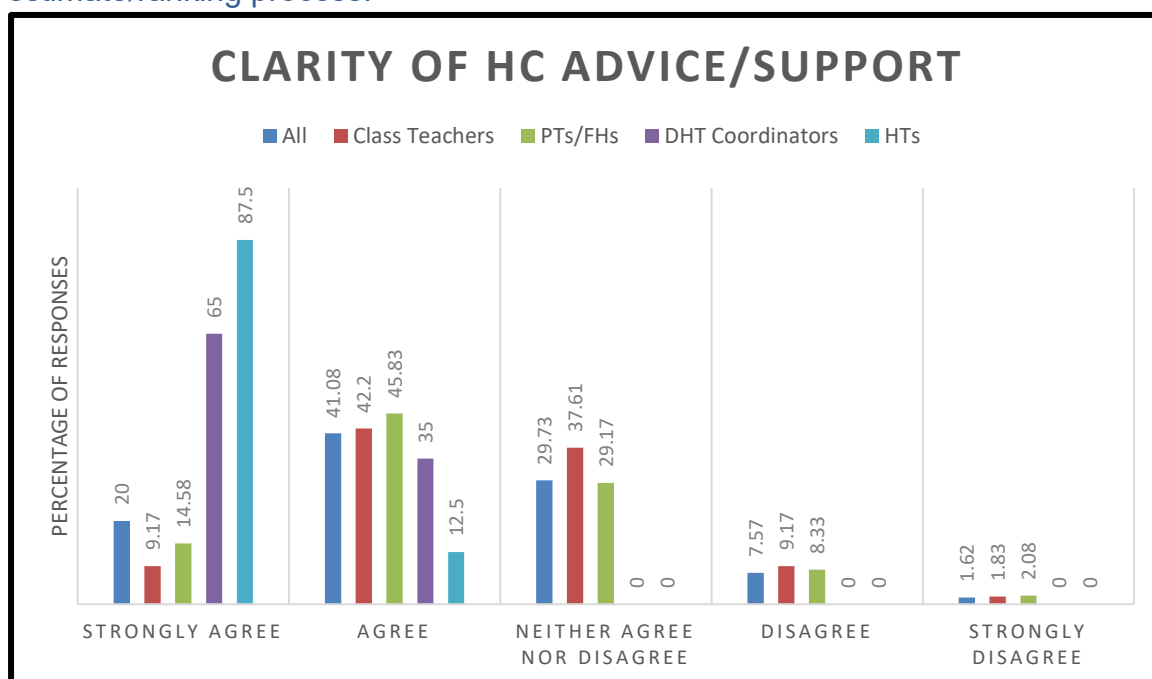
Over 70% of respondents felt that it was indeed appropriate to move to an estimate and ranking system (including all Head Teachers who responded). A number of respondents commented that it was appropriate that professional judgement was going to be the key factor in the awarding of final grades. While responses were largely positive, a number of concerns were conveyed through the accompanying comments. Many of these covered the uncertainty about the quality assurance process between (rather than within) schools. There were also a number of concerns raised about the process of ranking (which turned out to be well founded – see comments below). Concerns were raised about the process of considering previous attainment in schools, since, especially in small secondary schools, of which Highland has several, there can be considerable variation between cohorts. It is clear from a number of the responses that staff felt that significant time and effort had gone into producing their estimates and rankings and this caused some anger when the results were published on 4 August with significant departure from teacher estimates (see below). There was also a sense expressed that the role of rankings had not been made sufficiently clear. A number of responses indicated some uneasiness about consistency in the way estimates had been arrived at. A significant minority (around 20%) felt that other options could have been considered, such as a later examination diet or exploration of how exams could have been offered with mitigations in place. A number of respondents stressed the amount of time and care that went into producing and quality assuring the estimates and rankings.

Q3 - SQA provided clear advice and support for schools about how to complete the estimate/ranking process.



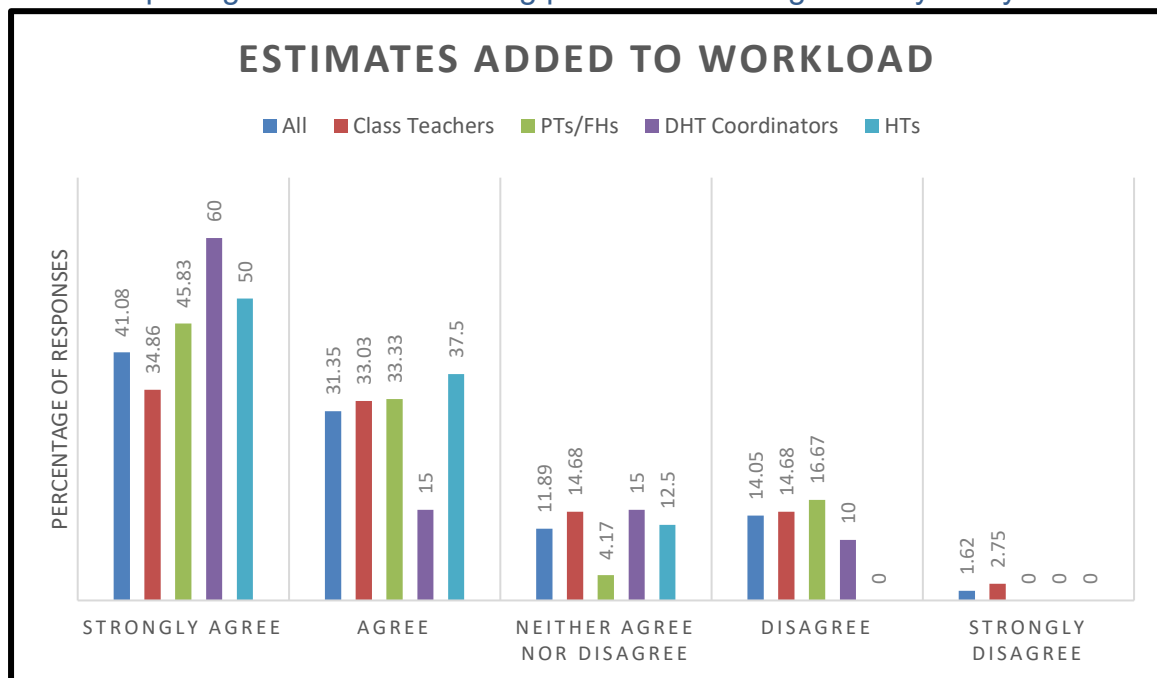
On the whole the returns show a positive view of the way advice and support was offered to schools, though there remained some doubt about the type of evidence which could be seen as valid. Some comments referred to the lack of clarity about the role that “inferred evidence” should play in the process (see also below about the sense that “inferred evidence” seemed to be excluded from the planned appeals process). A number of comments suggested the discrepancy between the initial advice received about how teachers should go about producing (and quality assuring) the estimates and rankings and the final process used by SQA to arrive at the candidates’ grades. A number of respondents indicated that they felt that materials already submitted could have been used to supplement the estimates and rankings. Some respondents commented on the difficulties of carrying out the process during lockdown.

Q4 - Highland Council provided clear advice and support to schools about the SQA's estimate/ranking process.



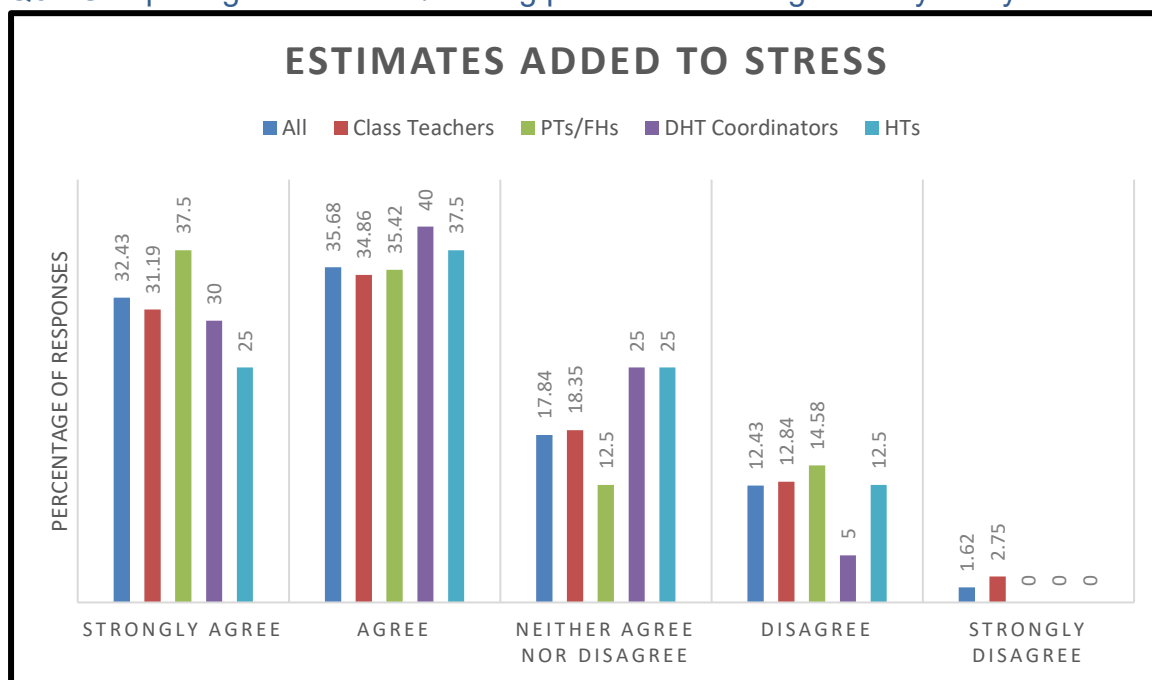
Responses here reflect the fact that communications and support provided by Highland Council were predominantly aimed at DHT SQA Coordinators and Head Teachers. A small number of respondents felt that the additional layer of communication from Highland Council led to confusion. 100% of DHTs and HTs agreed or strongly agreed that the Highland Council's advice was clear, and this was the target audience. Further consultation with schools about this should take place in the coming months to establish if there is a need for a separate communication from Highland Council to PTs/FHs and classroom teachers to augment communications with school SMT (Highland Council officers will be guided in this by the needs of school staff). Comments from SMT place the sharing of documents by Highland Council officers in the context of other interactions such as drop-in online support meetings.

Q5 - Completing the estimate/ranking process added significantly to my workload.



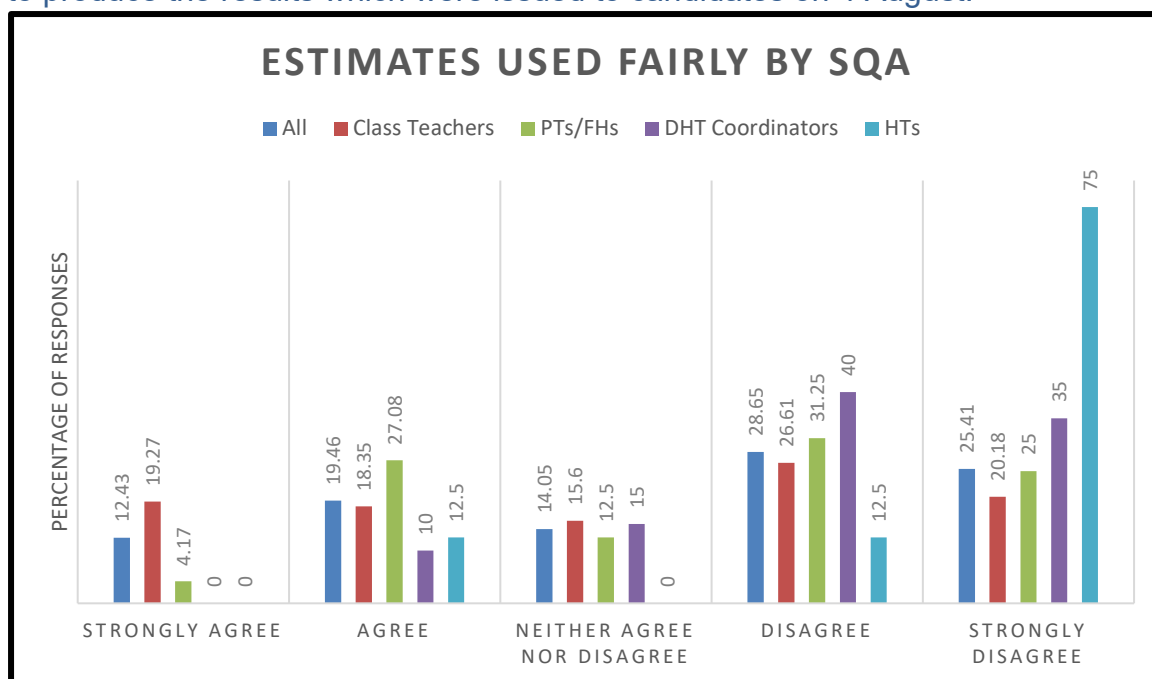
It is clear from the responses that the process did add to workload at a time when teachers were grappling with the realities of delivering online learning and developing new digital practices. The process took staff considerable time and the graph reflects the additional quality assurance responsibilities of PTs/FHs, DHTs and HTs. It is notable that SQA Coordinators had the strongest response here in terms of strongly agreeing with the statement that workload was adversely affected. Coordinators carried a significant burden in terms of the whole process, including the quality assurance process. A number of responses reflected the difficulty of doing this piece of work in an online environment rather than face to face (for example in establishing rankings). A few respondents commented that the work associated with providing estimates and rankings replaced other work that might have been done at this time of year and was therefore not overly burdensome. A recurring theme of the responses is the extreme care that staff took with the completion of this task, and this connects to the sense of disappointment that is expressed under question 7, below. Where staff disagreed with the statement here it tended to be because the numbers of candidates in their classes were small.

Q6 - Completing the estimate/ranking process added significantly to my stress.



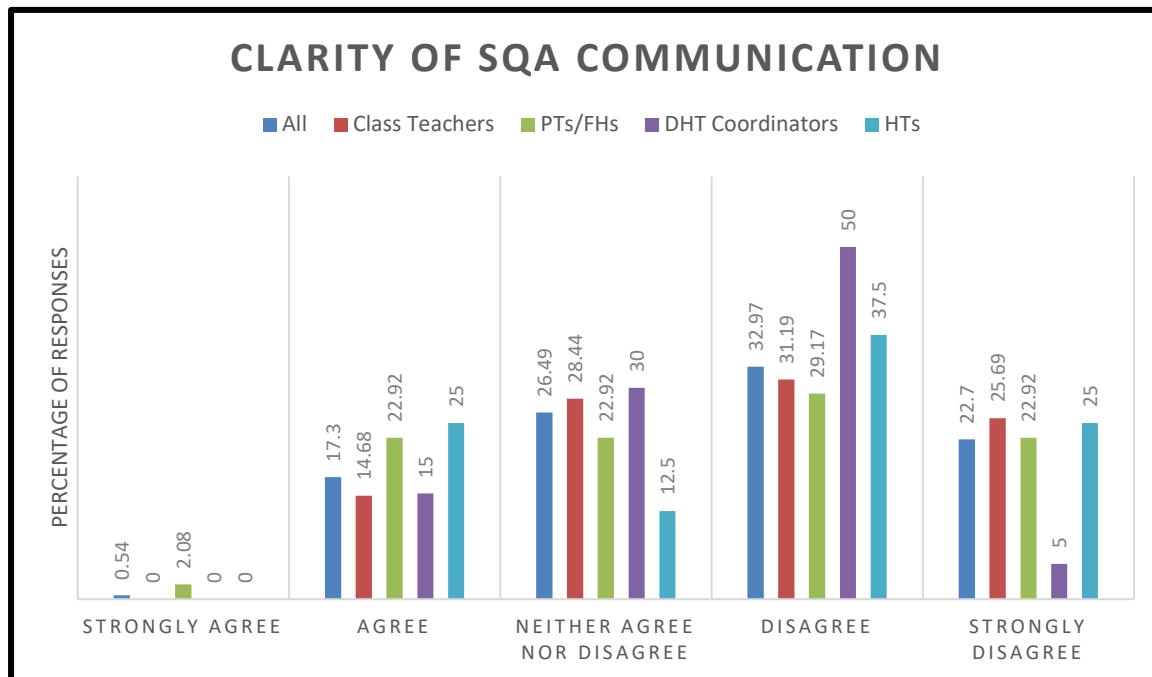
Several responses commented on the fact that this was a very stressful time in any case and that this process added to feelings of stress. It is clear from responses that staff took this responsibility extremely seriously and this is what led to the stress being experienced. It is very much worth reflecting on the fact that 126 out of 185 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the process added to stress levels. This key fact helps to explain the sense of anger that is expressed in the following sections of the survey. The professional integrity that underpinned the process of creating estimates and rankings seemed to be questioned by the moderation process applied by SQA over the summer. It is also worth noting that stress levels were affected not just by the process but by the circumstances of the process (i.e. communicating with colleagues digitally where the physical examination of evidence was problematic). It is also clear from responses that the ranking process caused for some an extra level of stress, especially perhaps for those who had never before had to carry out such a task.

Q7 - SQA took my estimates fairly into account when using the moderation rationale to produce the results which were issued to candidates on 4 August.



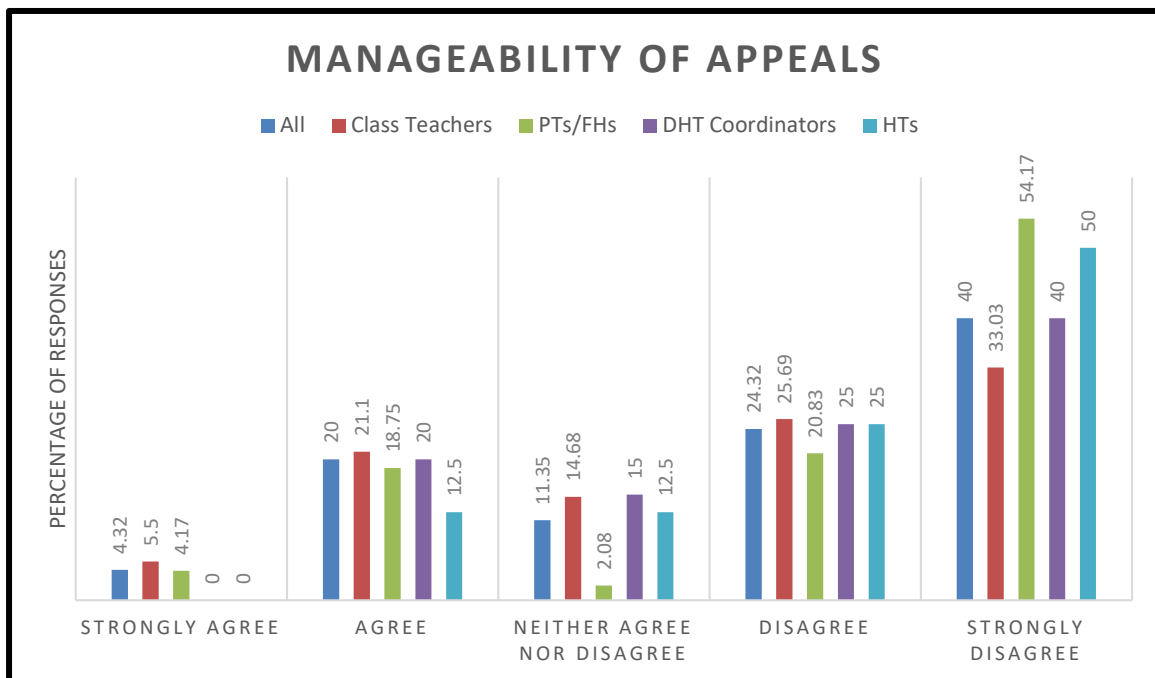
The earlier portions of the survey show that staff, despite finding the process of submitting estimates and ranking laborious and stressful, felt on the whole that this was the best solution. Responses to the current statement indicate the strong sense of disquiet about the way that these estimates were overturned by the SQA's moderation process. Not surprisingly the strongest feelings in the comments reflect situations where the moderation process led to significant changes to teachers' estimates (and upgrades are included in that as well as downgrades). The comments of class teachers (see Appendix) reflect a sense of shock and outrage at the extent to which teacher judgements were overturned in some cases. There are some very strong feelings evidenced in the comments about this. It is worth noting, however, that nearly 32% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the grades awarded on 4 August fairly reflected their estimates. Negative comments reflected on the lack of transparency in the moderation process, where, for example, it was difficult to see how the final grades awarded related to historical attainment patterns. Responses indicate that even after the publication of the moderation process details on 4 August, staff were still unclear about how grades had been arrived at. Some staff felt that, where their estimates were upheld in final grades awarded, this reflected on the accuracy of their professional judgements, whereas in fact no such judgement was made, since evidence of professional judgement was not looked at by SQA.

Q8 - Communication from SQA to teachers throughout the process was full and clear.



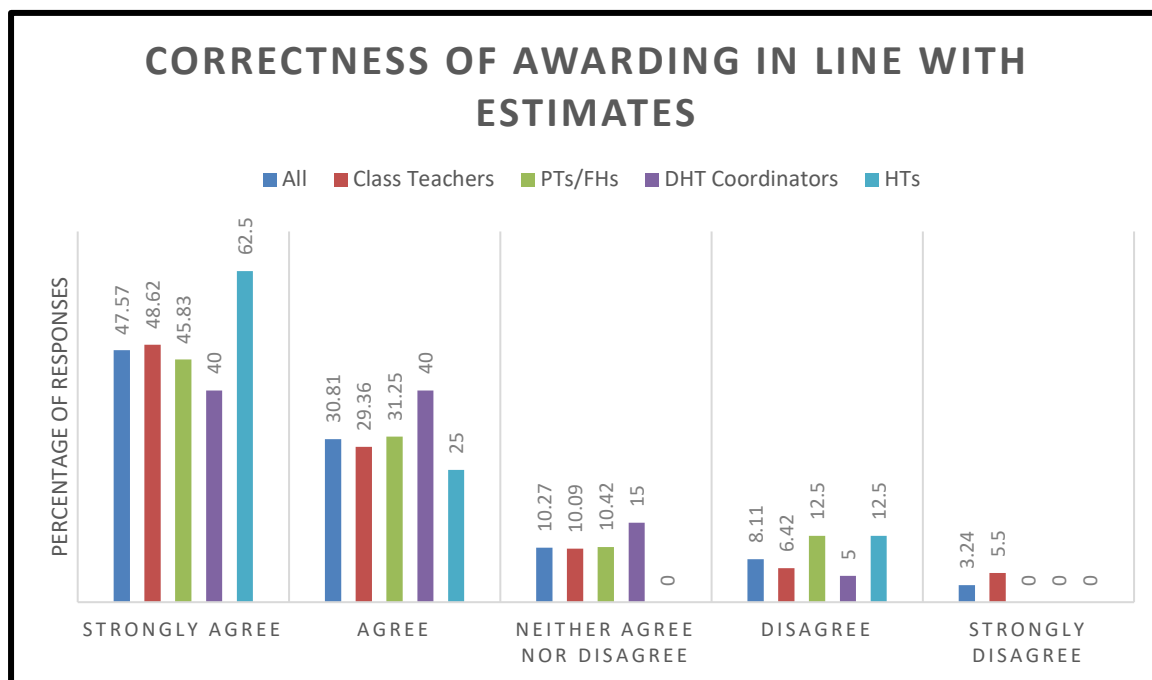
It is worth comparing this chart with the earlier one (Question 3) about the clarity of support information from SQA. The present chart shows a much greater degree of criticism of SQA around communication. Comments tend to focus on the silence from SQA about the moderation methodology before results day and the lack of communication about scenarios where attainment did not seem to coincide with previous patterns. Schools had been under the impression that SQA would seek dialogue with schools where this situation occurred. The lack of communication between the submission of estimates and results day meant that staff were taken by surprise by the high level of downgrades (more than 5000 individual grades were lowered across Highland). A perceived lack of transparency and engagement with schools has not helped in staff perceptions of SQA (see Q11 below). Some concern was expressed by respondents about the difficulty of eliciting comment from SQA throughout the process, using the dedicated email address that had been supplied by SQA.

Q9 - The appeals process, had it gone ahead, would have been manageable for me in terms of workload.



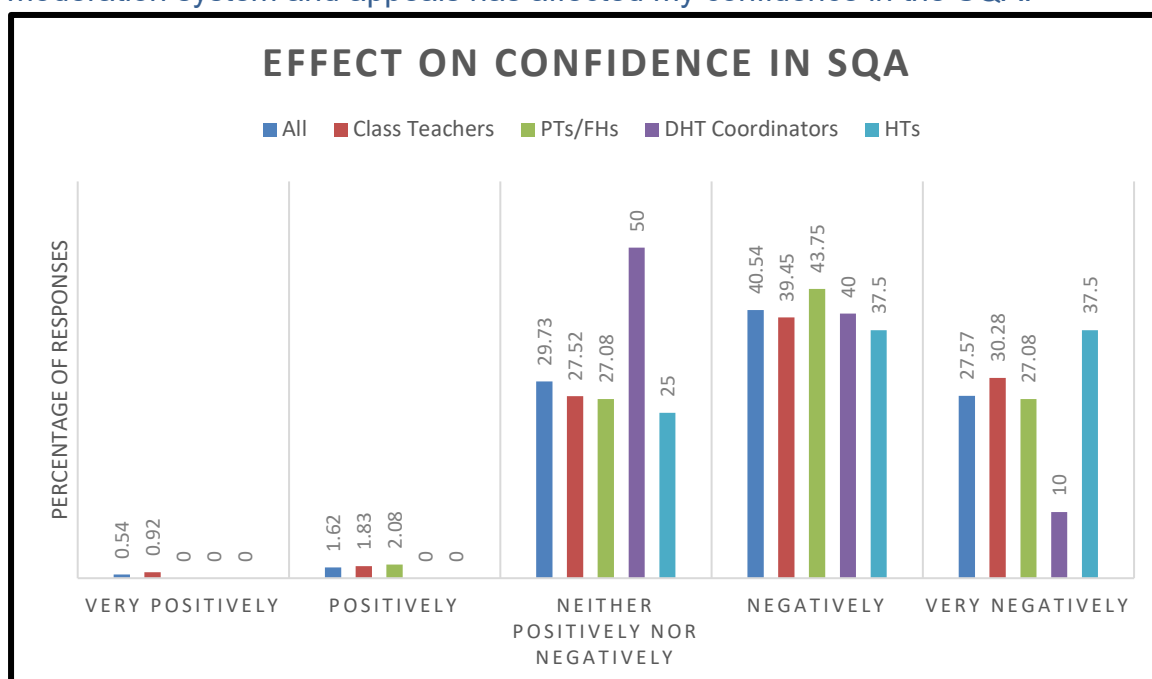
Given the high number of appealable grades (approximately 25% across all Highland Schools, with six schools having a third or more of their grades appealable) it is not surprising that the survey reveals high levels of anxiety about how manageable the process would have been. Nearly two thirds of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the process would be manageable (at a time when schools were returning with all of the other anxieties that this has brought). This would have been made even more problematic due to the need for staff to vacate the building quickly at the end of the day to allow cleaning to take place. Some concerns were expressed about the timescale, with a number of respondents commenting on the fact that the tight deadlines did not take into account the extremely unusual circumstances of schools reopening after a lengthy lockdown. It is worth noting that more than half of the Principal Teachers and Faculty Heads chose “Strongly disagree” here, and the comments from this group about the administrative burden of handling and quality assuring the appeal evidence. Concerns were expressed about the apparent dropping of the concept of inferred attainment when it came to the request for appeals evidence.

Q10 - The decision by the Scottish Government to award results in line with teacher estimates was the correct one.



As expected this table shows that more than three quarters of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the decision to accept estimates was the correct one. Many comments in this section of the survey focused on the fact that reverting to estimates restored faith in teacher judgement and professionalism (though several comments suggested there is a feeling that there was some over-estimation). Some concerns were expressed about the way the whole process, including the change of direction on 11 August, has been seen to have undermined the validity of the candidates' results and some comments express the view that with fuller consultation with schools the situation could have been avoided. A recurring theme in respondents' comments is that the lack of communication and genuine consultation meant the ultimate solution made the most of an unfortunate situation that could probably have been avoided.

Q11 - The experience of this year's SQA process covering estimates, rankings, the moderation system and appeals has affected my confidence in the SQA.



More than three quarters of respondents say that their view of SQA has been affected negatively or very negatively and some of respondents who commented “Neither positively nor negatively” indicated in their comment that they already had a negative view of SQA. Also to be found in the comments here was an understanding that the whole process had been problematic and that the SQA was faced with a difficult (or perhaps impossible) situation to deal with. It is interesting to note that the group surveyed who were the least negative about SQA were the SQA Coordinators, and this may well be down to their ongoing engagement with a very accessible and supportive SQA Liaison Manager, Jackie Hewitt. The comments reveal a high degree of sympathy with the SQA as well as criticism, but it is worth noting that the survey returns indicate the very significant problem facing SQA now as they re-engage with schools. Some of the comments in this question and the next strayed into commenting on the proposed changes to courses for session 20/21 and these comments suggest that there is much bridge-building to be done. A clear message from the responses that have been received is that trust between teachers and SQA has been damaged by what has been seen as a disregard for teachers’ professional judgement.

Q12 - Please add any further comments you would like us to take account of in our response to the Scottish Government's review of this year's SQA processes.

Responses in this section (see Appendix) often focused on what the next steps should be, and there were some calls for a review of the role of terminal examinations in the process of determining the success of young people in courses. Some respondents proposed various solutions to their perceived concerns about SQA provision, such as using other awarding bodies. Responses in this section echoed some of the comments in the previous section, indicating a weakening of trust between classroom practitioners and SQA. Several respondents suggested that a full scale review of SQA and its provision should be initiated in response to the experience of session 2019/20. A common theme in the responses in this section is that SQA need to engage more with the teaching profession, and should aim to

avoid the perception that as an organisation SQA is reluctant to communicate and collaborate with the teachers and schools. Responders acknowledged the difficult situation that SQA found itself in but felt that more could have been done to arrive at a solution that would have been acceptable across the board. Several responses drew attention to perceived illogicality in the way the resulting process was carried out (for example that all National 4 pass judgements by teachers were accepted but approximately a quarter of National 5 estimates were downgraded in the initial run of results).

Conclusion

We are grateful to the school staff who took the time to complete this survey at a very busy and stressful time in their establishments and the findings here are presented with the intention of supporting a solution-focused approach to moving forward with contingency planning in session 2020/21 and thinking about future approaches to assessment and certification. The survey indicates that much damage has been done to the developing relationship between SQA and schools and that some focused bridge-building will be required. An underlying message that recurs repeatedly in the comments submitted by staff at all levels in schools was the sheer professionalism and attention to detail of our classroom teachers, subject leads and school managers in the whole process of submitting estimates. It will be of key importance that contingency planning for assessing this year's cohort of young people involves genuine engagement with the teaching profession about the best way forward.

Donald Paterson

Highland Council Education Improvement Team (SQA Link)

Appendix 2

WARD	School(s)	Oct	Nov	Dec
1 North, West and Central Sutherland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farr 3-18 Campus Kinlochbervie 3-18 Campus 	12 th	9 th	14 th
2 Thurso and Northwest Caithness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thurso High School 	19 th	16 th	14 th
3 Wick and East Caithness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wick High School 	19 th	16 th	14 th
4 East Sutherland and Edderton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dornoch 3-18 Campus Golspie High School 	12 th	9 th	14 th
5 Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ullapool High School Gairloch High School Plockton High School 	19 th (or 15 th) (10-12)	23 rd (10-12)	14 th (10-12)
6 Cromarty Firth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Alness Academy Invergordon Academy 	12 th	9 th	14 th
7 Tain and Easter Ross	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tain Royal Academy 	12 th	2 nd & 23 rd	14 th
8 Dingwall and Seaforth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dingwall Academy 	19 th	16 th	21 st
9 Black Isle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fortrose Academy 	5 th	2 nd	7 th
10 Eilean a Cheo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Portree High School 	5 th & 26 th	2 nd , 9 th , 16 th & 21 st	7 th , 14 th & 21 st
11 Caol and Mallaig	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mallaig 3-18 Campus 	26 th	16 th	7 th
12 Aird & Loch Ness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charleston Academy Glen Urquhart High School Inverness Royal Academy Kilchuimen 3-18 Campus 	12 th	9 th	14 th
13 Inverness West	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inverness High School Charleston Academy 	26 th	30 th	21 st
14 Inverness Central	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inverness High School 	22 nd	18 th	16 th
15 Inverness Ness-side	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inverness Royal Academy 	12 th	9 th	14 th
16 Inverness Millburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Millburn Academy 	12 th	9 th	14 th
17 Culloden & Ardersier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Culloden Academy 	30 th	28 th	2 nd
18 Nairn & Cawdor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nairn Academy 	16 th	6 th	11 th
19 Inverness South	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Millburn Academy Inverness Royal Academy Culloden Academy 	Tbc*	Tbc*	Tbc*
20 Badenoch & Strathspey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grantown Grammar School Kingussie High School 	5 th	2 nd	7 th
21 Fort William and Ardnamurchan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lochaber High School Ardnamurchan High School Kinlochleven 3-18 Campus 	26 th	16 th	7 th

*Ward Manager to confirm