

Schools Reopening

The Scottish Government confirmed on 6 April that all secondary school pupils would be back in school on a full time basis after the Easter holidays. The Government published its 'Guidance for opening schools in April 2021' [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance on reducing the risks in schools - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/consultation-papers/covid-19-guidance-on-reducing-the-risks-in-schools/)

This guidance includes:

- Confirmation that a full-time return for secondary schools is on the basis of no physical distancing required between pupils
- School staff and other adults in the school should continue to apply strict 2m distancing when with other adults and with pupils.
- All staff areas and schools must ensure adequate staff facilities in all staff areas with 2 metre physical distancing
- Update on vulnerable and shielding staff to follow medical advice
- Face coverings should now be worn at all times by staff and young people in secondary schools; (including S1-S3 learners) in classrooms, in communal areas and when moving about the school.
- Pupils behaving or acting in a way which doesn't align with school policy or procedure can be excluded.
- Focus on ventilation and other mitigations
- CO2 monitors being provided to schools – mixed picture in local authorities

SSTA Advice

- **SAFETY FIRST must be the first priority in all workplaces**
- **All Risk Assessments including individual risk assessments must be reviewed**
- **Risk assessments of vulnerable and shielding staff need to be cognisant of their own individual medical practitioner instructions**
- **All staff must follow all the mitigation measures including 2 metre physical distancing and the wearing of face coverings**
- **Secondary schools should look to minimise movement of young people and staff when in school.**
- **Staff numbers working in school buildings should be kept to the minimum required at any one time; all others should continue to work from home**

National Qualifications 2021

The Government guidance states

- The priority during the phased return from 15 March, and on immediate return after Easter, should be to maximise learning and teaching time. This will impact on the timing of assessment, which can take place in the later stages of the 2020-21 session.
- SQA has produced subject-specific guidance for a range of qualifications, taking into account disruption to learning this year, that sets out the key evidence required for each course.
- National standards will be applied based on a holistic assessment of this key evidence of demonstrated attainment, to determine provisional results.
- Teachers should use the flexibility to assess learners at times and in ways that are appropriate to their needs in order to manage the assessment burden on young people during the remainder of the academic session.

Additional in-service days and £400

The First Minister's announced that two additional days will be set aside for assessment procedures, with teachers and lecturers involved in awarding national qualifications this year receiving a one-off payment of £400.

The Government has written to Directors of Education notifying them of the ability to use two additional in-service days for supporting the delivery of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM). They were advised that these days could be deployed flexibly at the discretion of individual Local Authorities.

The Government is continuing to work through the exact eligibility criteria, but it appears to be any teacher who is involved in at least one activity of assessing, marking or moderating a National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher course would be eligible for the £400 payment. As this is a payment in respect of additional work associated with the Alternative Certification Model (ACM), and given the time needed to make payroll changes, it is likely that a payment will be in July/August after the conclusion of the centre based element of the ACM.

SSTA Comment

The arrangements for National Qualifications 2021 will create severe workload complications for both pupils and teachers and puts undue pressure in providing evidence to meet the SQA demands.

The use of the two additional in-service days has been left to individual local authorities and appears to be for the purpose of verification and not time for preparation and correction of evidence. The reports we have at present show a wide variance, with some Local Authorities using the dates in early May whilst others are preparing for dates in mid-June. These discrepancies will only add to the pressure on pupils and teachers.

The SSTA believes an over bureaucratic national qualifications process is unachievable and the focus must be on supporting teachers making competent professional judgments and not gathering evidence to replace the teachers' professional judgement. It is essential that all pupils receive grades that reflect their merits throughout the course.

Members must ensure that Headteachers are made aware of the time necessary to undertake all tasks associated with the national qualifications 2021 at the earliest opportunity. Working Time Agreements will need to be reviewed in light of the demands of the Alternative Certification Model.

The SSTA's view of the £400 additional payment, despite it being inadequate and not reflective of the work or the expertise required in the process, should be paid to all secondary teachers.

School Teachers' Pay 2021

The latest meeting of the SNCT Extended Joint Chairs took place on 31 March. The employers were unable to make an improved pay offer until a meeting with the Finance Minister had taken place. Although an agreement was made to continue discussions it will be unlikely any progress will be made until after the Scottish Parliament elections in May.

Teachers' Pension Consultation - Increase in age for access to pension

A [consultation has been opened by the Government](#) on the increase of the age where pensions can be accessed from 55 to 57 by 6 April 2028.

The consultation that closes on 22 April 2021 and individuals are able to respond.

The SSTA is opposed to the proposed change. The SSTA argues against any further increases applying to the Minimum Pension Age both for existing teachers and new teachers coming into the profession. Once again, the government risks discriminating against new and old members of the Teachers' Pension Scheme.

Should a scheme member exercise their right to retire early, the scheme applies an actuarial adjustment to those benefits to ensure there is no extra burden on the public purse.

See the [SSTA response to the Consultation here](#).