



SSTA Survey - Alternative Certification Model (ACM) – May 2021

Appendix B - A Selection of Members Comments

SSTA Headteacher Comments

“Workload has been phenomenal. Teaching and leading for over twenty years. I have never had a workload like this year. My staff and I are exhausted, stressed and deeply concerned about the mental health of pupils within our care. The logistics and timescale of what we are being asked to do is unachievable within a normal working week. Weekend working is now my normal. Very little has changed on our expected normal school year but all the additional work throughout this year has been beyond belief”.

“There have been numerous times that I have been really close to having to stop before I went under. I wept through frustration of not being listened to, wept through exhaustion and wept because I felt that I was failing my staff and the pupils. The only thing that kept me going was experience that I knew that I was good at my job and if I left or was ill with stress the house of cards would collapse. I could write a novel on the insanity of this year. The only positive I can state is the pride in my staff who have supported each and every pupil throughout this academic year”.

“No proper Headteacher representation on the NQ2021 group to talk about the actual operational actions that they have asked us to do – clearly no one on that group has had recent or living school experience”.

“Meetings with parent forums where information was shared re the alternative certification date and the need for schools to use anything for evidence saying children can be reassessed as many times. This happened a week before the SQA posted anything to the profession”.

“Putting the pressure on teachers to deliver the good or the bad news re provisional grades. This is causing a major stressor in the system and this should not be our news to break. The timescale for QA and then scrutiny from LA means we will need to turn reports around in two days. Mistakes will be made”.

“Appeals process has yet to be outlined is only adding to the pressure on all. How can you play the game when you don’t know the rules?”

“Staff have tried to shield our pupils from the burden of excessive assessments however this has had a detrimental effect on them. The pupils have appeared to be stressed regardless of what we’ve tried to do”.

“This whole ACM has been a nightmare of stress for both staff and pupils. I have visibly seen the stress on the faces of my staff and the pupils. This has been the worst, most pressurised time of my whole career”.

Teacher Comments

“Demonstrated attainment only with SQA papers being deemed the best highly predictive evidence. Every paper is in the public domain as they were told would happen and so there is now no integrity in the system and young people will have advantage and disadvantage in equal measures”.

“No consideration of the four months of remote learning – how were we suppose to gather evidence which was valid for assessment?”

“No plan B for schools where young people were ill/asked to isolate – simply told to delay assessments where possible OR worse than that – do it next year!”

“Lower ability children do not have the same time scale for generating evidence as N5 to AH and AGAIN where there are issues – just certificate them next year! SO in the SQA’s eyes these kids don’t matter”.

“No effective support for PE where young people are national standard and haven’t trained in their sport for a year – expected to demonstrate attainment in other sports”.

“The additional workload created by the SQA on teaching staff is ridiculous. Having to mark and cross mark papers within the school (more than one assessment paper) plus moderation marking with other schools. As a SQA marker previously I have found this year to be substantially more stressful with a huge increase in workload with no additional time to complete these duties”.

“I worry about how equitable this system is across all of Scotland because standards across schools/regions can and likely will vary. The SQA marking keys were largely insufficient and needed to be modified in order to better support students' results and to ensure that the marking was fairer. This also incurred more workload for me”.

“This has been a terrible time for staff and pupils, all for the sake of grades/qualifications that are always going to have a question mark over their credibility. I normally mark for SQA but have found myself doing more marking. My colleagues and I are all exhausted and stressed. The pupils are simply not being given a "fair deal" considering the disrupted year they have had”.

“Awful term for both teachers and pupils. Ridiculous amount of stress on both sides. Aware of some teachers who have been very specific in telling the pupils what to revise in some cases, which heightens the inequalities our pupils face”.

“There is a vast difference between pupils of lower SIMD and higher. Yet again the gap will be widened. There was more to it than just being provided with a device and internet connection. A lot of pupils don't have a quiet space to work at home, were sharing devices, need to help look after siblings. Not to mention health issues going on- mentally and physically. AND these are CHILDREN who suddenly are meant to be capable of motivating and teaching themselves!!! I would like to know what the plan is for next year! Courses are already behind due to delays in changing timetables. We need to know NOW what the exam arrangements for 2022 are”.

“COVID related absence is now making it impossible to assess and collect the evidence we have been told we must have which is basically the same as usual, an assignment and an exam”.

"The ACM is an absolute disgrace with so many mixed messages from the SQA, the Scottish Government and local authorities. There is no consistency across schools, SQA papers are being used at different times and in different ways, some schools are using teacher judgement, some are sticking strictly to grade boundaries, some pupils have had four weeks of assessment since returning.....the list goes on!"

"The goal posts have changed way too late. The requirements introduced by the SQA have rendered much of the work pupils produced before these announcements less valuable. The SQA clearly does not have teachers in their ranks, otherwise they would have more understanding of what is achievable. Teacher's professional judgement should be the standard going forward, because the SQA does not know what it wants. The SQA has not put pupils first and this is their greatest failing".

"Assessments are a disgrace. They are exams pure and simple. Pupils, teachers and parents fully aware the SQA has done nothing to aid mental health and has exacerbated the situation by providing guidance AFTER most of the course work was completed. Paperwork 'updates' far too long-winded and teachers insulted by the re-hashing of updates that still had last year's date on them"

"As well as the huge workload involved with two rounds of formal assessments for seniors, we are trying to get BGE classes back on track, do SNSA, do tracking reports on all years, and get ready for new timetable on a few weeks. The workload is totally unreasonable".

"Pupils have returned to school and rather than support them in enhancing their mental health, schools have added additional pressure to pupils which was unnecessary. Completely and utterly unacceptable the way children and normal classroom teachers have been treated since the return to school".

"The statement from SQA that grades must be evidence based is being largely ignored by parents who focus on 'teacher judgement' and 'grades will not be amended by SQA'. Parents have the impression that teachers are responsible for 'awarding' grades and despite being told these are evidence based, believe these are somehow at teachers' discretion".

"My school's approach has been disgraceful for the pupils. It has severely impacted upon their mental health, with several taking panic attacks or crying during class time because of the sheer number of assessments (up to 3 a day) and pressure put on them, it's tragic to see".

"Crazy expectations of both pupils and teachers, really not good for anyone's health and well-being. I believe a lot of teachers will leave the profession and pupils will leave school early due to the unreasonable demands placed on both of us".

"Our pupils are under SO much stress. It is distressing to see how this "evidence gathering" exercise has caused so much upset and mental exhaustion. Some pupils are undertaking 3 assessments in one day and some have multiple days like this. It is ridiculous. So much for "no SQA exams".

"Hearing the First Minister say that there was no requirement for exams, and the Deputy First Minister / Education Secretary say that teachers could use professional judgement and take pupil circumstances into account, when the documentation from SQA says the opposite of this brought me great dismay. Parents have not read the SQA advice that we have to work to, and just hear that teachers supposedly have more control than we actually do. If SQA did not follow the advice they were given by the politicians, then that needs looked at immediately. It is too late to institute major change, but the inclusion of teacher judgement and consideration of individual circumstances would be welcome".

“This session has been a total disaster from the SQA. Persistent changes in outgoing information have made it very frustrating with regards to keeping pupils informed and composed. The Alternative Certification Model and guidance surrounding it has only gone on to cause a total nightmare for pupils, teachers and senior managers. We have practically inherited the workload of the SQA in terms of administering, marking and moderating assessments”.

“We have completed assessments with some of our pupils already and are now being told to get them to sit even more assessments to prove that they are competent at the “minimum requirements”. I have pupils who would think they were “done” with the subject after these assessments but I now have to tell them they need to sit even more material”.