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Breadalbane Academy
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Breadalbane Academy SQA Alternative Certification Model FAQs

25th May 2021

What is the alternative certification model?

The alternative certification model is an approach to certification developed by the SQA in response to the Scottish Government's decision in October 2020 to cancel all SQA external examinations in 2021.

In this model, the grades that a pupil receives from SQA are based on teacher judgements of their attainment in the courses they take.

What is 'demonstrated attainment'?

It is important to note that the SQA requires such teacher judgements to be based on what they call 'demonstrated attainment'. In other words, teachers must have appropriate evidence of a pupil's performance to support their judgements.

How is Breadalbane Academy generating evidence?

As described in the update to parents of 1st April, the school has identified three 'windows' for assessment. The first was in week beginning 26th April and the second is currently taking place. We have also identified a notional third assessment opportunity which will take place in early June for those pupils for whom it is deemed necessary.

Are teacher judgements based on one assessment only?

No: teachers are asked to make an 'holistic' judgement of pupils' performance over the session which will involve looking at evidence from a range of assessment opportunities, including informal and formal assessments. Teachers will also take into account prior attainment and the future performance this would suggest. There is also specific guidance for each subject from SQA which teachers will take account of in terms of curriculum areas to be covered and weightings of various aspects of course work. You can find this information on the SQA website.

How does the school quality assure teacher judgements?

There are a range of ways in which teachers' judgements will be quality assured. At department level, the principal teacher will have responsibility for ensuring standardisation of grading. This will include department discussion of assessment performances and individual gradings, as well as cross-marking/moderation activities. All principal teachers will also look

at individual prior attainment as well as historical patterns of attainment within their subject area to ensure that judgements for individuals or groups are not anomalous.

How does the local authority quality assure teacher judgements?

Departments are required by the authority to undertake similar quality assurance activities with schools across the local authority and wider Tayside area, and you will be aware that two full days have been set aside this year for these activities. If required, headteachers can also draw upon targeted support from the local authority where it is felt this is needed.

Collated results will be provided to the local authority in mid-June where they will be subject to further central quality assurance. At this point consideration will again be given to ensuring that all school-level quality assurance procedures have been followed and that schools' overall judgements are robust and credible, for example in terms of the schools' historic patterns of attainment.

When will final grades be communicated to parents and pupils?

We aim to issue reports to parents on either Monday 21st or Tuesday 22nd June (depending on timing of feedback from the local authority). As previously stated, the reports will be final and cannot be changed. These will be the grades that the school submits to the SQA on 24th June.

When will we have an indication of likely final grades?

The May tracking report issued last week should provide pupils and parents with a good idea of likely final grades, though there is a possibility that some of these may still go up or down. The school will contact all parents in cases where it looks likely that the final grade may be lower than the grade provided in the May tracking report. We are keen to bring about a 'no surprises' situation when the reports are issued in June and will do everything we can to ensure both pupils and parents have a strong idea in advance of the contents of this report.

What if a parent is unhappy with the grades that have been shared in the May tracking report?

If this is the case, you should contact the school explaining your concerns and we will look into this and get back to you. It is important that if you have concerns you raise them with us at this time.

What if a parent is unhappy with the grades that are issued in the June final report?

As stated, these grades will not be changed, except in the unlikely event of an inputting error. We are still waiting to hear from the SQA regarding formal channels for pupils or parents to appeal grades and will share this information with you when we receive it.

How reliable is in-school assessment, given the nationally publicised sharing of assessment materials on platforms such as TikTok?

The important point to reiterate in this context is the fact that teacher judgements will not be based solely on one assessment but arrived at by reviewing a range of assessment evidence, albeit that some assessment will have a greater weighting than others. A suspiciously outstanding performance in one assessment would not therefore automatically map across directly to a very high provisional result. More importantly, though, were a pupil to gain unfair advantage by having prior access to an assessment, this would be likely to result in a performance anomalous enough to raise questions in a teacher's mind. All pupils have been made aware that the SQA will investigate robustly any concerns regarding malpractice, such as sharing secure materials or gaining unfair advantage by engaging with such materials in advance of an assessment. Where the school feels a pupil may have engaged in malpractice it is required to report this to the SQA.

Whilst school-only assessment is new for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher, it has in fact been the normal approach for qualifications at National 4 level and below for many years and school staff are very clear about the need for high level security for assessments in such cases. We have taken every possible step to ensure that our own school will not be a source of such 'leaks'.

Finally, if parents are aware of malpractice, we would request that they make the school aware of this so that it can be investigated.