

Leas Phrìomh Mhinistear agus Rùnaire a' Chaibineit
airson Foghlam agus Sgilean



Scottish Government
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Our Reference: 202000073565
Your Reference: Letter to Deputy First Minister re SQA

28 August 2020

Dear Mr Hobbs

Thank you for your email of 7 August, regarding the moderation system used to award exam results this year.

Following results day I reflected closely on feedback from learners, parents, teachers and others across our education system, and quickly concluded that, while the system was designed in difficult circumstances, and with the best of intentions, it has had an impact on individual learners' results that cannot, in all circumstances, be seen to be fair.

Given the genuine distress caused, and the impact of receiving anomalous or inexplicable results on learners and their families, action had to be taken. You will appreciate that the approach was put in place for what was thought to be the right reasons; to uphold the integrity of the exam system, so that results would be properly respected in years to come. I do, however, recognise that it has delivered an outcome that cannot remain in place and I am determined to put it right so that Scotland's young people have the best possible chance of success.

That is why, on 11 August, I announced that all downgraded results will be replaced with the proposed grades put forward by teachers.

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Tha Ministearanna h-Alba, an luchd-comhairleachaidh sònraichte agus Rùnaire Maireannach fo chumhachan Achd Coiteachaidh (Alba) 2016. Faicibh www.lobbying.scot

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The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) has now informed schools and colleges of the revised results. Replacement certificates will then be reissued to all those affected, showing results without any downward moderation. Any results which were not downgraded by SQA moderation will not be changed.

I also recognise that, in some individual circumstances, there continues to be a need for the option of an appeal. The detail on this process can be found on the SQA website at: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/94840.html>.

For those applying to university, revised results will be sent to UCAS by 4 September so that they are able to secure places. I have spoken to Scotland's universities and they are awaiting those results.

You may wish to note that I have written directly to many young people and parents to apologise for the difficulties this system has caused, and I would extend the same apology to all those affected. The last few months have been some of the most difficult young people in Scotland have had to face, every aspect of life having been impacted. That makes it all the more important that where we have made a mistake in our approach to this crisis, we listen and we correct it.

Going forward, I have asked Professor Mark Priestley, of Stirling University, to undertake a review of the events leading to the awarding of SQA grades on 4 August, so that we can learn from this year's approach. The areas being considered include teachers' estimates, the moderation methodology used by the SQA and the impact on young people and their families. Professor Priestley will report to the Scottish Government in September.

With regard to closing the attainment gap, you may be assured that this is a defining mission of this Government; which is why we are investing £750 million in the Attainment Scotland Fund over the course of this parliament to support the Scottish Attainment Challenge. Now more than ever there is a need for a strong focus on equity and excellence and our commitment to that will remain consistent throughout and beyond this challenging period.

You may also wish to note that many schools and local authorities use substantial proportions of their Scottish Attainment Challenge funding to deliver targeted approaches that support disadvantaged learners to engage where they would otherwise not be able to do so. That is why we are continuing with our commitment to invest £182 million from the Attainment Scotland Fund in 2020/21.

I trust that you will find my reply helpful.

Yours sincerely



JOHN SWINNEY

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