To:	**Education and Children's Services Policy Board**
On:	**28 October 2021**

Report by:	**Director of Children's Services**

Heading:	**SQA Alternative Certification Model**

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1. Summary

1.1. The Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was originally developed for National 5 courses, in response to the Deputy First Minister's announcement on 7 October 2020 of the cancellation of National 5 exams. Following the cancellation of Higher and Advanced Higher exams on 8 December, the Scottish Government expanded the ACM to cover Higher and Advanced Higher, as well as National 5.

1.2. On publication of the Alternative Certification Model on 16 February 2021, Renfrewshire Council developed clear and robust guidance which outlined specific actions at each stage of the process.

1.3. Our focus was on ensuring that young people got the results that they deserved through inter-authority quality assurance processes which ensured grades were subject to rigorous checks.

1.4. Our delivery model ensured school autonomy to design their approach to assessment based on courses and programmes experienced by their young people while ensuring there was a robust overarching framework that supported a rigorous approach to quality assurance at all levels.

1.5. Overall, levels of attainment in 2021 were broadly similar to 2020; however, they remained above previous years where an exam diet took place.

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2. Recommendations

2.1. Elected members are asked to:

- endorse the achievements of our young people this session, noting the particular challenges posed by the changes to education and certification arising from the pandemic; and

- recognise the hard work and dedication of school staff in the implementation of the ACM.

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3.   Background

3.1.   Members will recall that on 7 October 2020, the Scottish Government announced that the planned diet of SQA National 5 examinations for session 2020-21 would be cancelled. This was followed by a second announcement on 9 December 2020 that the planned diet of SQA Higher and Advanced Higher examinations for session 2020-21 were also to be cancelled.

3.2.   On 16 February 2021 the National Qualification 2021 Group published the revised alternative certificate model (ACM) for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher.

3.3.   The key difference from the traditional certification model was that schools were asked to take the lead on determining provisional grades based on assessment evidence. This had never happened before.

3.4.   The SQA stated that a provisional grade should be 'a holistic review of a candidate's performance as indicated by assessment evidence'; unlike the 2020 estimate it should be an evidence-based prediction of final attainment and does not include an inferred element. SQA provided guidance in relation to this.

3.5.   Provisional results, determined by demonstrated attainment, were shared by schools with all pupils in advance of submission to the SQA on the 25 June. Unlike the previous year, no changes were made by the SQA to provisional grades submitted by schools. Only clerical checks were carried out before final grades were shared with young people across Scotland on 3 August.

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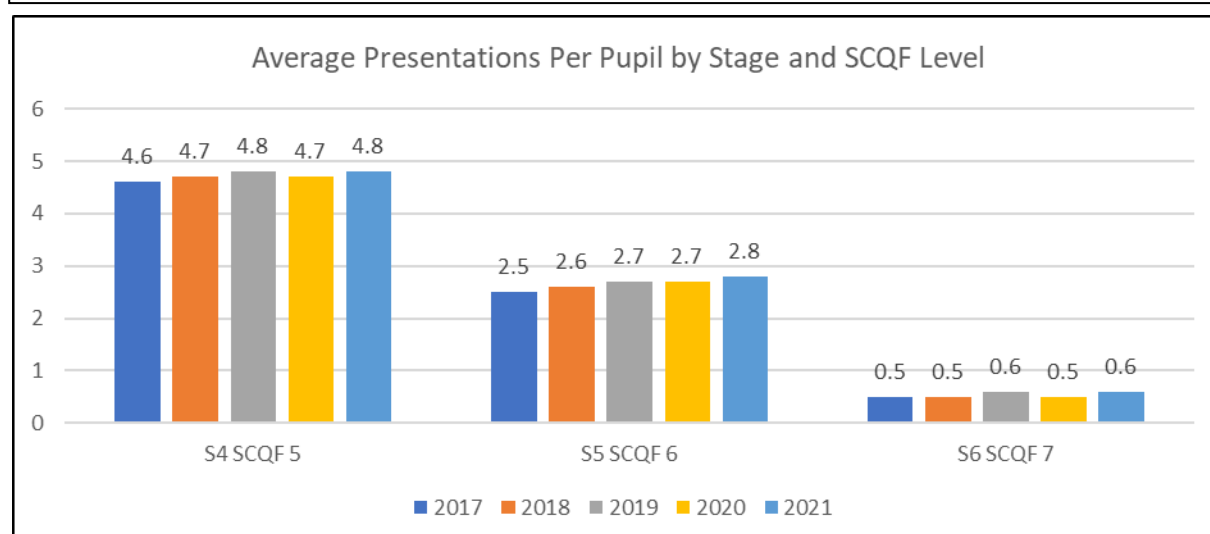## 4.   Implementation of Alternative Certification Model

4.1.   Our focus was to ensure that pupils got the results that they deserved through a robust inter-authority quality assurance process which ensured that grades were subject to rigorous checks.

4.2.   The Central Education Team worked closely with all schools to ensure that we were providing all necessary support and challenge. This included:

- Frequent secondary HT meetings that have taken place with the Director and Heads of Service providing HTs with the opportunity to share ideas, ask questions and develop their thinking around the ACM.

- Local guidance, based on SQA guidance, was developed with senior school staff. It set out a process for the creation and validation of assessment and how schools should undertake moderation to ensure a shared understanding of standards and expectations. The policy guidance was also peer reviewed by another Local Authority.

- Ongoing data analysis support was provided by our data management team.

- Moderation teams for every subject were created to provide external moderation as required. These teams were accessed at the request of schools or in response to analysis by the central education team or SQA feedback.

- Monthly meetings with subject leaders were facilitated by Education Managers with agendas agreed in advance.

- Regular meetings of SQA coordinators including weekly drop-in sessions with the SQA's specifically allocated liaison manager.

4.3. In addition, PTs worked together to implement the ACM. Sub-groups were set up through subject networks, with schools working in pairs or trios to validate assessments and moderate candidate evidence. Subject leads also carried out validation of assessments.

4.4. The ACM delivery model in Renfrewshire was recognised by HMIe as being a highly organised, systematic and well-planned approach to assure the quality of learning, teaching, assessment, monitoring and tracking, moderation and verification in all schools.
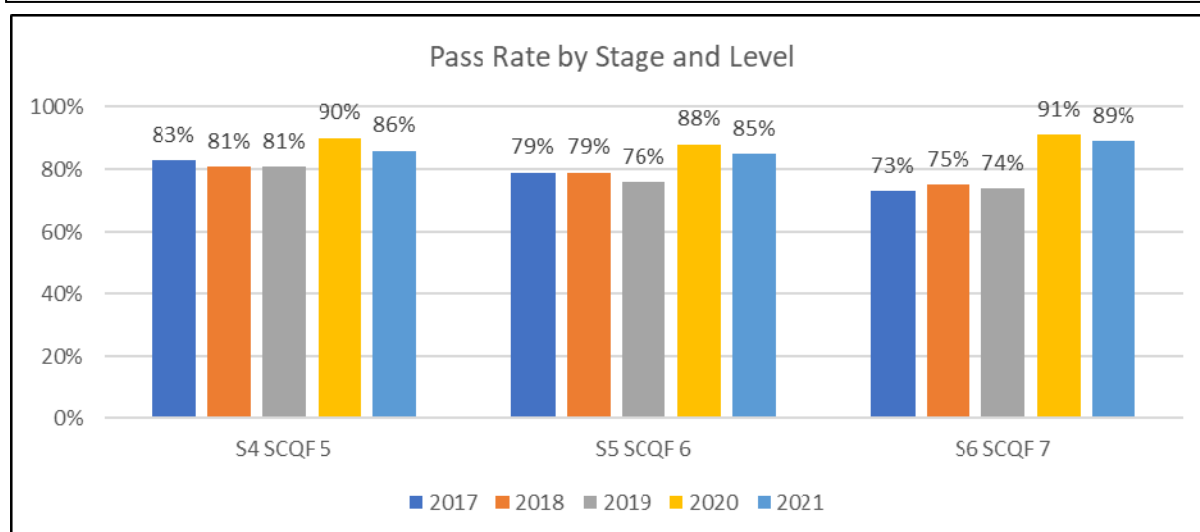
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5. Attainment Summary

5.1 Initial analysis of attainment data shows that Renfrewshire's young people have performed well at all qualification levels.

5.2 Despite a challenging year, high presentation rates were maintained. In some subject areas presentation rates were higher than in previous years.

Graph 1: Average Presentation Rate by Stage and SCQF Level

Average Presentations Per Pupil by Stage and SCQF Level

	S4 SCQF 5	S5 SCQF 6	S6 SCQF 7
2017	4.6	2.5	0.5
2018	4.7	2.6	0.5
2019	4.8	2.7	0.6
2020	4.7	2.7	0.5
2021	4.8	2.8	0.6

5.3   Pass rates remained high across all stages.

Graph 2: Pass Rate by Stage and SCQF Level

5.4   Attainment trends in Renfrewshire are similar to the national picture, although a full analysis for all local authorities will not be available until the release of Insight (National Senior Phase benchmarking tool).

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6.   Conclusion and next steps

6.1.   The Scottish Government announced on August 18 that SQA examinations would go ahead in 2022 if safe to do so.

6.2.   Due to the disruption caused by the pandemic, for most National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, the modifications to course content that was introduced by SQA last year will remain in place for session 2021-22 across all schools in Scotland.

6.3.   These modifications will help to make the assessment process more manageable and will include modified question papers for SQA exams.

6.4.   We will continue to work closely with all schools to ensure that all pupils are given the best possible support to achieve success.

Implications of this report

1.   Financial
None

2.   HR and Organisational Development
None.

3   Community/Council Planning

Our Renfrewshire is fair -

Tackling inequality, ensuring opportunities for all -

Working together to improve outcomes -

4.   Legal
None.

5.   Property/Assets
None.

6.   Information Technology
None.

7.   Equality and Human Rights
The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report because for example it is for noting only.   If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.

8.   Health and Safety
None.

9.   Procurement
None.

10.   Risk
None.

11.   Privacy Impact
None.

12.   Cosla Policy Position
None.

13.   Climate Risk
None.

List of Background Papers
None

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