

PAY UPDATE

The NASUWT continues to press, within the Scottish Negotiating Committee for Teachers (SNCT), for a substantial pay increase for teachers.

A meeting of the SNCT Extended Joint Chairs (EJCs) took place on 31 March 2021 and the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) outlined a differentiated pay offer.

- a 2% uplift for those earning up to £40,000; and
- a 1% rise for those earning over £40,000, with a cap of £800.

It did not amount to a substantial teachers' pay increase and, through the SNCT, the NASUWT rejected the pay offer. A further meeting of the SNCT EJCs took place on 5 May 2021. Unfortunately, there was no improved offer from COSLA.

The COSLA leaders met on 28 April, but although pay was discussed, it was decided to await the outcome of the election, and further discussions on finance with the Scottish Government, before reconsidering the terms of the offer. Another meeting of the SNCT EJCs took place on 7 June 2021. No improved offer from COSLA was made at the meeting.

COSLA has written to the Scottish Government requesting a meeting to discuss local government funding. These further discussions on finance with between COSLA and the Scottish Government are deemed necessary by COSLA leaders before there can be any reconsideration of the terms of the offer.

The Teachers' Side, while noting COSLA's position, have made it clear that the ongoing delay was very disappointing. COSLA was also urged to exhibit more urgency in improving its offer and reaching a pay settlement. The point was made forcibly that allowing this situation to drag on would not be conducive to educational recovery during 2021-2022.

No date was set for the next meeting of the EJCs, as this will be contingent on the outcomes of the meetings between COSLA and the Cabinet Secretaries for Finance and Local Government.

ACM Appeal Deadlines

Following representations by the NASUWT that the information the SQA issued in relation to the appeals process was very brief, further guidance was published on Friday 11 June: <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/96506.html>.

The Union has been calling for explicit confirmation from the SQA that there was no expectation of teachers being available during the summer holidays to engage with the process. The NASUWT is opposed to any proposal for the handling of appeals which would require teachers to be involved in managing the appeals process during the summer.

The SQA has acknowledged that the timelines for priority appeals requests are tight and has pointed to the need to meet deadlines for the UCAS turnaround of conditional offers for progression into higher education (HE). However, it has confirmed that the deadline for receiving priority requests has been revised from 16 to 24 August, meaning there will be no requirement for teachers and lecturers to handle appeals requests until after they return from the summer holiday.

This shift in the priority request deadline followed robust NASUWT representations, in which the Union has successfully secured guidance which avoids any attempt to bring teachers in over the holiday.

It is understood that further operational guidance is being collated within the SQA, which will be published and issued to centres before Tuesday 10 August 2021. This guidance will include detailed instructions on how to use the appeals system, submit learner evidence and confirm any subject-specific requirements for non-standard subjects.

The NASUWT will continue to campaign for a formal review of the whole approach to National Qualifications in 2021 and, where necessary, key decision-makers to be held to account and a commitment to genuine consultation and engagement with the NASUWT and its members in future.

Historical Data and Quality Assurance

The Union has raised with the SQA the lack of clarity in relation to the locus of local authorities in analysing trends and looking at patterns which are inconsistent with previous data and thereafter amending grades.

The National Review of Local Authority Approaches to Quality Assurance, as part of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) published on 2 June highlighted: <https://education.gov.scot/media/p5nlpo2o/national-review-of-local-authorities-role-in-acm.pdf#>.

'Most local authorities have developed bespoke data analysis tools to support school level quality assurance. These provide key attainment information in an easily accessible format that will allow staff to analyse provisional results against three-year or five-year trends from historical data. Local authority officers expect staff to use these tools to review concordance data, including young people's prior attainment, and identify and address any unexpected provisional grades. Local authority officers plan to analyse trends to discuss this year's provisional results with headteachers, with a particular focus on verifying the data and identifying and challenging results or attainment patterns which appear anomalous. This includes consideration of historic patterns and trends of attainment when compared to this academic session's provisional results, at individual, departmental and school-level. Positively, local authorities continue to provide professional learning for staff at all levels in data analysis and in the use of senior phase data from the national 'Insight' 1 resource.'

The Union has been clear, both in writing and in meetings with the SQA, that the consequences of failing to communicate in sufficient detail with teachers around the ACM can have grave consequences for them individually and professionally. Furthermore, where there is a lack of detail or confusion, a myriad of different approaches are adopted which undermines the 'national' part of the national qualifications process.

The SQA, in response, has confirmed that:

'Whilst data can be helpful in helping a local authority, school or department to determine what they may wish to consider for quality assurance, decisions about what grades to award must be based on the teacher's professional judgement of a learner's demonstrated attainment. So for example, if a department is delivering for the first time, if there has been a change in staff, or if it is a single teacher department, a school may wish to ensure that their approach to quality assurance samples learner evidence in these scenarios. There has been no change from this position in terms of using data and it remains the case that grades are awarded on the basis of learner evidence.'

It is abundantly clear from the current mess created by the Scottish Government and the SQA over the arrangements for the awarding of qualifications this summer that reform is needed. Teachers have lost confidence in both the SQA and Education Scotland, and an overhaul of systems and structures is now needed in the best interests of schools, teachers and pupils.

The Union will continue to press the Government to ensure these reforms are not a cosmetic exercise. The NASUWT has already warned that a growing over-emphasis on assessment and bureaucracy is disempowering teachers, damaging their morale and undermining their ability to meet the needs of their pupils.