



Research, Insight and Analysis

Pulse Survey

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Parent and Carer Engagement Survey

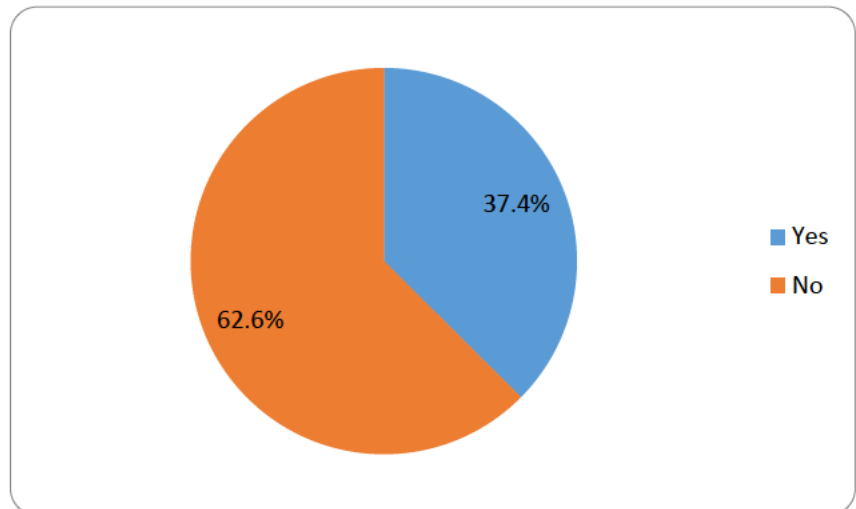
Introduction

In February 2021, RIA carried out a pulse survey with parents and carers of children in S4 to S6 exploring how they felt about SQA’s communication and engagement with them. The survey was sent to 2,425 individuals and 1,264 participants completed it: a response rate of 52%. The pulse survey was open for 11 days. All respondents had at least one child taking at least one National Qualification in 2021.

This paper analyses the responses.

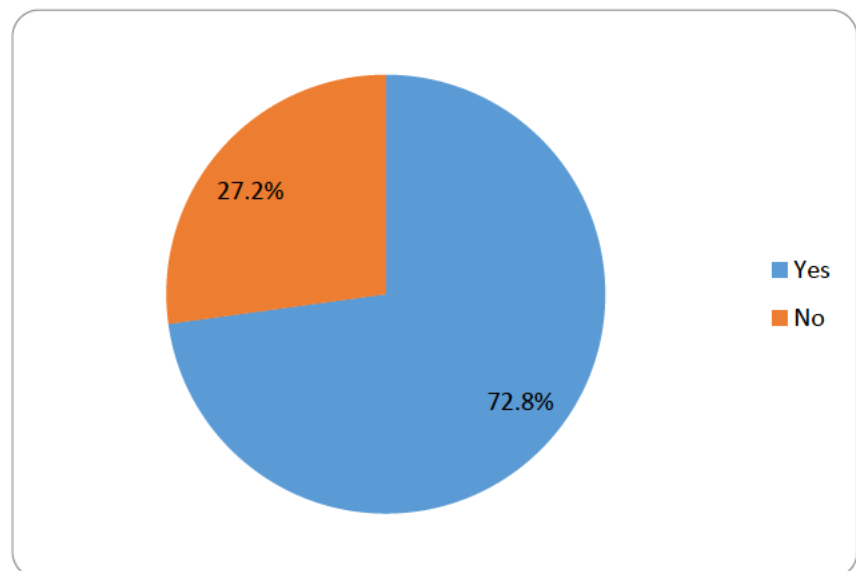
Would you consider yourself well enough informed about how qualifications will be awarded this year?

While 467 respondents thought that they were well enough informed about how qualifications will be awarded this year, 780 did not.



Are there areas which you feel you need more information on?

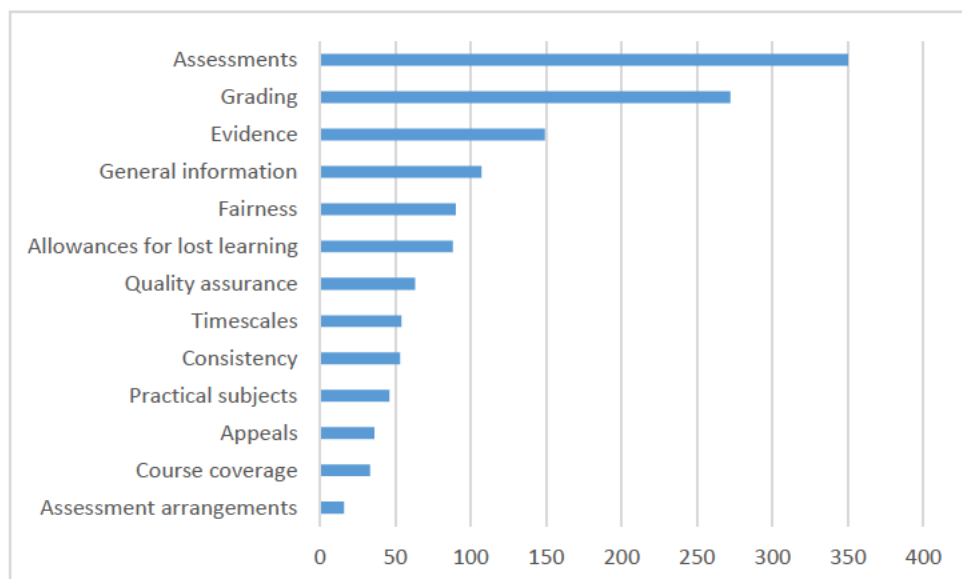
A total of 339 respondents thought that they did not need more information, but 909 thought they did.



What would you like more information on?

Those respondents who thought that they did not have enough information were asked about what they felt was lacking. A total of 883 individuals submitted comments. This was a free-text response, so there was a range of suggestions. However, 350 respondents felt that they needed more information on their child's assessments, 270 on how grades would actually be decided, and 150 on evidence requirements.

There were also several responses that expressed frustration that parents and carers did not have enough information at all and needed the whole 2021 awarding process explained clearly.



Assessments

Many parents and carers are unsure how their children will be assessed this year. While some of the issues raised are not strictly within SQA's remit – such as the use, or otherwise, of prelims – they do indicate the level of confusion amongst this audience group with regards to how assessments will be conducted.

It was announced that there would be no exams this year by Scottish Government but my son's school says there are exams going ahead so I am very confused.

Will assessments/prelims/exams take place in school?

Is there going to be any form of exam type assessment? le end of unit test, school designed exam or bought in paper?

Are all schools using the assessment materials set by SQA?

Why are they being expected to sit assessments but not exams?

It's not acceptable that ... the SQA continue to expect schools to implement SQA exams.

The responses above – and many more similar ones – demonstrate a clear need for more information for parents and carers on how and when assessment will take place. There is a distinct lack of certainty on what children's assessments will entail and whether these assessments are set by SQA.

This information need not necessarily come from SQA (it could be from school themselves or from local authorities or government), but there is evidently a gap in parents' and carers' understanding of how children will be assessed in 2021.

Grading

Related to the assessment comments, many respondents also asked how grading would work this year, and what grades would be based on.

Exactly how grades are being decided – the criteria. There is a lot of conflicting information coming from the school which seems to stem from conflicting SQA information. A more concise and open criteria of grading would be helpful for me as a parent.

Comments here also betrayed a wider uncertainty about the 2021 ACM, for example on whether grades would be based solely on teachers' estimates, what quality assurance will take place, what course content would be included in assessments, how much allowance will be given for loss of learning, and what evidence will be required.

Evidence

Again, related to the comments on assessments and grading, many parents and carers wanted more information on the evidence that will be required. While some thought that teachers would be basing grades solely on formal assessments or prelims, others thought coursework would be included. There were also differing views on whether coursework gathered from children while learning from home could or should be used as evidence.

Some respondents questioned how evidence could be collected, given children have been out of school for so long, and what would happen in the event that most children are not back before Easter.

How exactly teachers will obtain evidence to assess pupils? Some subjects have not given pupils tests while they were at school while others have.

I would like more information on what will be used as evidence for awarding grades and how the school intends to gather the required evidence.

I do not understand how the required number of key pieces of evidence can be gathered in what looks to be a very short time frame once schools eventually return.

General information

More than 100 respondents argued that they needed clearer information encompassing the whole 2021 ACM process. Some suggested that it was too difficult to follow the detailed subject-level updates on SQA's website and that a high-level summary was required.

A clear flowchart of the process which each pupil's award will follow. That is from submission of work, marking, to receiving the certification.

Many respondents suggested that in order to fully support their child, they needed clarity on this year's process and requirements such as those mentioned above regarding evidence.

Other issues

As noted in the chart above, there was a range of other areas where respondents felt they needed more detail. This included how practical subjects would be assessed, what the appeals process would be, and what would happen to children who would ordinarily have assessment arrangements in place.

More than 60 respondents wanted to know about the quality assurance process, with many asking if more than one teacher would mark their child's assessments. A few asked if processes would be the same as in 2020 or whether algorithms would be used.

The quality assurance theme tied in with the numerous queries about consistency and fairness. However, while some respondents emphasised fairness in terms of comparability of awards across schools, others thought fairness was more to do with taking into account this year's disruption and making allowances for the loss of learning time.

How will periods of self-isolation be reflected in final grades?

How the assessment criteria will take account of limitations during the current lockdown.

Given the amount of lost learning/teaching will the grade boundaries be reduced? You can't expect the same results from children who have missed six months in school.

Similarly, more than 30 respondents asked specifically about course content and what proportion had been removed this year. While the comments were generally supportive of removing course content due to this year's disruption, there were a number of parents or carers who were concerned that the whole course would not be covered and asked if there would be catch-up opportunities and if this could affect their child's future plans.

Where do you generally get information about your child's or children's qualifications?

When asked about where they generally get information about their child's qualifications

- 89% of respondents get information from their child's school
- 33% from their child
- 22% from SQA's website
- 14% from social media
- 11% from friends or word of mouth
- 8% from other sources

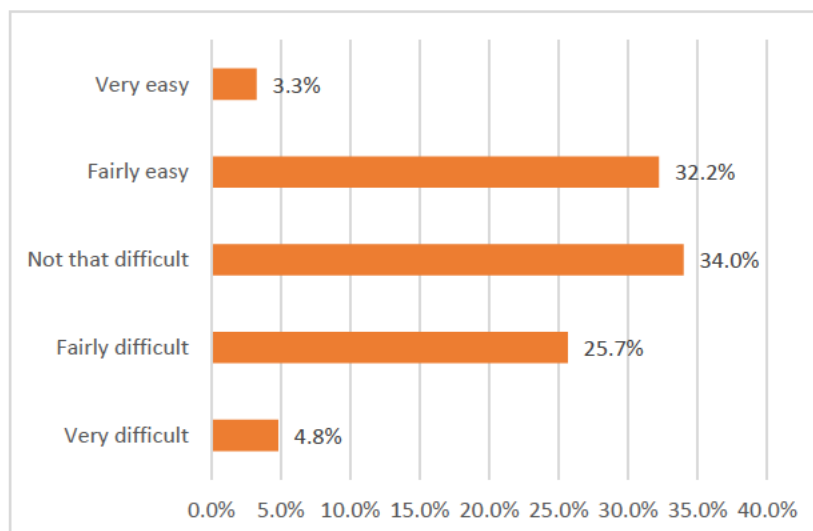
Other sources included government, parliamentary, and local authority updates, parent councils, and the schools the respondents themselves work in, but the main one, cited by 40 respondents, was from news and media.

Have you used SQA's website to access information recently?

A total of 454 respondents (or 36%) said that they had used SQA's website recently.

How easy did you find accessing the information you required on SQA's website the last time you used it?

Of those who had used SQA's website recently, two-thirds said that they found accessing information on SQA's website 'not that difficult' or 'fairly easy', while a quarter found it 'fairly difficult'.

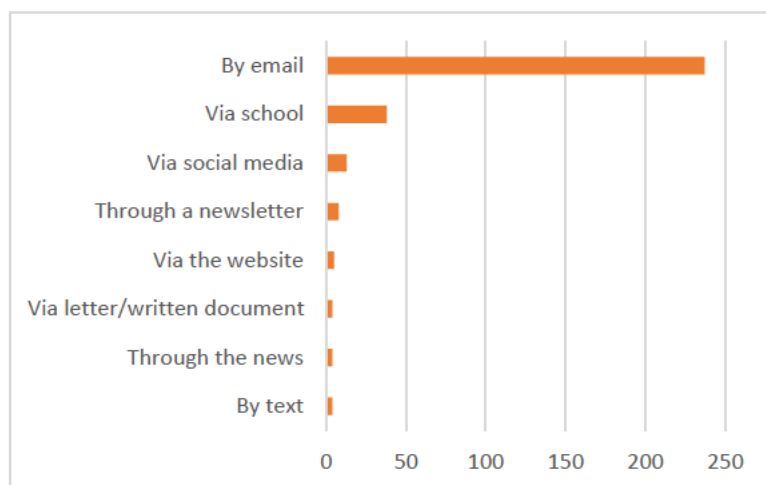
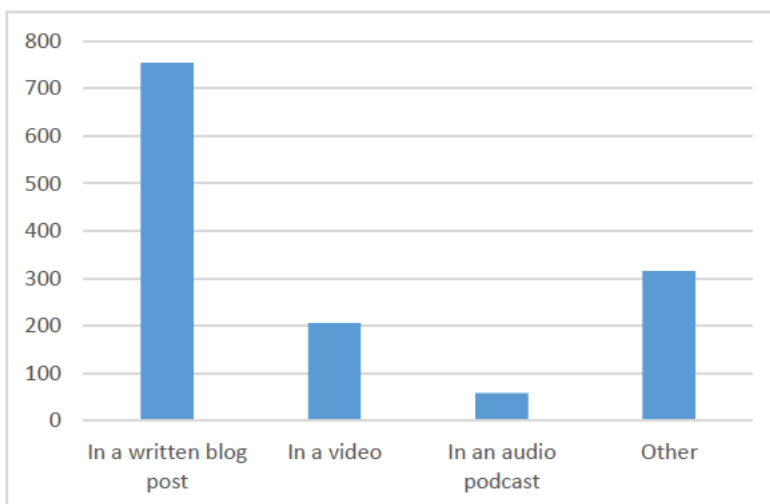


Are you aware of SQA's blog for parents, carers and learners?

Only 7.5% of respondents (93 individuals) said that they were aware of SQA's 2021 blog for parents, carers and learners.

Would you prefer to receive SQA updates...

A total of 750 respondents said that they would prefer to receive SQA updates in a written blog post, with 200 preferring in a video format. However, 315 respondents chose 'other' here.



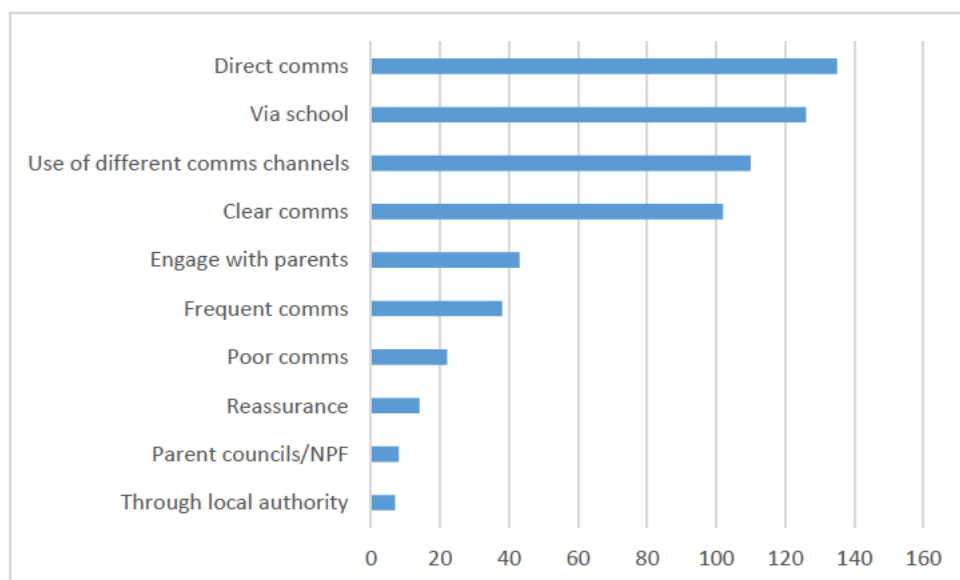
Of those who selected 'other', 240 suggested in an unprompted response that they would like to receive direct emails from SQA.

Do you follow SQA on...

- Twitter – 18% of respondents
- Facebook – 12% of respondents
- Instagram – 1% of respondents
- None of these – 74% of respondents

Do you have any other comments on how SQA should communicate and engage with parents and carers?

When asked for any final thoughts on how SQA should communicate and engage with parents and carers, 550 respondents submitted comments. These comments covered a range of areas, but can broadly be categorised by theme.



The most striking aspect of these comments was the split between those respondents who wanted to see more direct communication from SQA to parents and carers and those who thought that all SQA communications should be channelled through the school. It seems that parents who have a good relationship with their child’s school are keen for all SQA-related information to be directed via that channel to avoid any confusion, while those whose experiences with their child’s school are less positive would like to hear from SQA directly.

A number of comments focused on SQA’s use of different communication channels. In general, SQA’s use of multiple channels was deemed to be important, particularly for those who do not use social media, for example. Several respondents stated that they were unaware of SQA’s presence on social media and thought that we – with the help of schools, possibly – should do more to advertise and raise awareness of it. On a positive note, many respondents said that, as a result of this pulse survey, they would now follow SQA on social media and visit the blog and website.

While there were many instances of respondents bemoaning SQA’s perceived poor performance over the course of the pandemic (not just in terms of communication and engagement), there were also others who acknowledged the difficult situation and appreciated the efforts that have been made. Parents’ and carers’ comments, in the main, suggested that they understood how challenging the situation is, but that uncertainty around the 2021 ACM was very stressful for them and, particularly, their children.

A handful of respondents stated that they were grateful to have the opportunity to feed back to SQA through this pulse survey and expressed the hope that they would continue to be

able to do so. More still stated their desire for more and deeper SQA engagement with parents and carers, be it through consultations, Q&A sessions, webinars, or forums.

Many parents and carers are looking for reassurance from SQA for themselves and their children. Regardless of their preferred method of communication delivery, many respondents suggested that SQA communications need to be timely, frequent, and, most importantly, clear and concise. A repeated request was for simplified, non-technical, and bite-sized information that helps parents and carers support their children in this difficult and unusual time.

I think regular contact needs to be made to reassure parents and children that the process this year will be fair, equal and the eventual qualification worthy of its grade and name so for young people moving on in their education the qualifications they gained during the pandemic are valued by further education and employers.

Continual and regular engagement with parents/carers is essential just now. We need now more than ever to be able to reassure and support our children.