

Scottish Qualifications Authority submission of 21 July 2023

PE2014/B: Revert to the appeals system used in 2022 for SQA exams

Thank you for your letter of 6 June 2023 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee, asking for further information on the 2023 Appeals service.

In February 2023, SQA announced that a free and direct appeals service will be available for all learners from 8 August 2023, giving them the right to request a review of their marked exam papers.

The service was developed following an [extensive evaluation of the exams and appeals services that were in place in 2022](#), with more than 3,500 learners, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and principal assessors feeding back their views and experiences. Careful consideration was given to these views along with further consultation with stakeholders and users and informed the evidence-base for decision making around the approach to appeals in 2023.

The appeals service, together with a number of other measures, were put in place in recognition of the ongoing impact of disruption to teaching and learning that young people across Scotland have experienced due to the global pandemic. The other measures included the modifications to assessments, helping to free up more time for learning and teaching of the course content.

In addition, an Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) was in place for those who were unable to sit an exam or whose performance was affected by personal circumstances. Once all the exams were marked, our approach to setting standards and grading continued to be sensitive to the extent of the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

These measures, based on evidence, help to ensure fairness, provide safe and secure certification of qualifications, and maintain the integrity and credibility of the qualifications system, in the interests of all learners.

How the 2023 Appeals service was decided

There were a number of themes from the evidence gathered from stakeholders that informed the decision making process for the 2023 Appeals Service.

The 2022 Appeals Service had no provision for learners who wished to have their exam scripts reviewed by a marker. We received a number of queries and complaints from learners who were keen to use this service in 2022. In light of issues that can arise for awarding bodies every year with the marking of scripts, we believed it was essential to have a review of marking service re-introduced in 2023 to protect the interest of all learners.

Evidence indicated that the 2022 Appeals Service was not, on balance, fair to all learners in Scotland because the standard and coverage of evidence varied between centres. The evidence also highlighted the importance of alternative evidence remaining available for learners who really need it — for example those who experience exceptional circumstances and were unable to sit the exam.

Half of practitioners surveyed and most senior appointees surveyed highlighted that they would prefer a return to a review of marking in 2023, with a lack of fairness and excessive workload for learners and practitioners being cited as principal drivers.

Respondents noted that there were also centres that took a lot of time in creating prelims and generating other valid forms of assessment, but there was a concern that an appeals process based on alternative evidence increases the assessment burden on learners overall.

Practical implications of the 2023 Appeals service on outcomes compared to the temporary approach in place in response to the pandemic and to the original appeals approach.

The [2022 Appeals Statistics](#) indicated that learners do not always benefit from appealing based on alternative evidence with 58,035 (11.0%) of the 526,610 certificated grades for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher being appealed in 2022. 17,300 appeal requests (29.8%) resulted in an upgrade and five (less than 0.05%) resulted in a downgrade. The majority of requests resulted in no change of grade.

Most candidates did their best work in 2022 on the SQA assessments — 80% of all entries achieved their estimate or better. Of those eligible to

submit an appeal, approximately two thirds did so, with a 30% success rate. This means that fewer than one in five of all those eligible made a successful appeal. In this respect, we believe a marking review provides a more equitable and fair service to all learners.

The approach taken to appeals in 2022 differed from previous years. In 2019, the EECCS was accompanied by a Post Results Service (PRS) which involved a clerical check and marking review. The PRS and EECCS services were introduced in 2014 as a replacement for the legacy appeals provision which included the use of alternative evidence.

Historical data gathered by SQA, indicated that the legacy appeals provision was problematic due to issues of equitable access, fairness for absentee candidates and the volume of work the service generated for the wider system. Evidence gathered from awarding in 2022 indicated that the issues of inequity found in the legacy appeals provision reoccurred in the Appeals Service in 2022 which was cause for concern.

With the reintroduction of the marking review and clerical check service in 2023, SQA will ensure that every learner's grade is entirely based on their performance in the SQA set and marked course assessment.

In 2023, the appeals service will be free of charge, including the right for learners to submit a request. The EECC service supports a review of learner alternative evidence, which means that alternative evidence is only used where learners have truly exceptional circumstances.

I hope this is useful as the Committee considers this petition. I am happy to answer any further questions.

Fiona Robertson
SQA Chief Executive and Scotland's Chief Examining Officer