



Scottish Qualifications Authority
Ùghdarras Theisteanas Na H-Alba

27 March 2024

Sue Webber MSP
Education, Children and Young People Committee
By email to: ecyp.committee@parliament.scot

Contact: Fiona Robertson

Dear Ms Webber

Today, we have published the findings of in-depth research into the performance of the awarding of National Qualifications in the 2022-23 session.

This research provides the education community in Scotland with invaluable insights into the experiences of almost 5,000 learners, teachers, lecturers and senior examiners as they reflected on their use of National Courses.

I know this is an area of interest to you and the members of the Education, Children and Young People Committee and wanted to share some of the key findings with you.

We thank all those who gave their time to share their experiences. It is particularly encouraging to see the 67% increase in the number of learners engaging with us, compared to last year, including those with disabilities, with additional support needs, with a range of equalities characteristics and from different SIMD quintiles.

In addition to the views and experiences of the approach to awarding used in the 2022-23 session, the package of research includes analysis of the use of dual presentation at National 4 and National 5, the relationship between teacher estimates and results and the performance of National 5 Maths, where A-C performance in 2023 fell below pre-pandemic levels.

The research findings, together with our engagement with the education community, informed our decisions about the approach to awarding in the 2023-24 session, [announced](#) earlier this month.

Key findings from the research have been shared with the wider education community to inform their decision making. The research will add to the other sources of insight into how the 2022-23 session performed, such as national attainment data, published last August.

The findings have also contributed to Scottish Government plans for reviewing the Maths curriculum, its education reform programme and its reminder to schools on the appropriate use of dual presentation.

Among the key findings:

- 71% of learners and 66% of practitioners agreed that how qualifications were going to be assessed was communicated to them effectively.

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- 76% of learners and practitioners agreed that they had understood how grades would be determined.
- 58% of learners and 50% of practitioners agreed that the assessment process was fair for learners and 55% of learners and 53% of practitioners agreed that they were satisfied with it.
- 66% of practitioners thought that the grades awarded in 2022-23 were either very credible or credible.
- 78% of practitioners and 59% of senior examiners agreed that the national standard was consistently understood and interpreted by practitioners.
- 95% of senior examiners agreed that the approach used for awarding in 2022-23 ensured all relevant factors were considered when setting grade boundaries.

Our staff remain committed to listening to what our stakeholders, in particular teachers and learners, have to say about their experiences of our qualifications and assessments. This research, following the evaluations published in 2022 and 2023, is vital to ensure that we continue to deliver for Scotland's learners, the economy and wider society by bringing practitioners and learners into the heart of our decision making.

The ten research reports, including an overall and a learner summary, can be found at:

- [**Evaluation of the 2023 Approach to the Assessment of Graded National Courses: Summary Report**](#) - This report summarises the range of evaluation activity carried out by SQA since the conclusion of the 2022–23 academic session.
- [**Experiences of and Reflections on 2023 National Qualifications Assessment**](#) - This report pulls together the views of learners, practitioners, senior appointees and Qualifications Development staff to give a full picture of the feedback received on important issues relating to standards and the ways that learners were assessed in 2023.
- [**Learner Experiences report**](#) - Detailed research that aims to understand the experience of assessment in 2023 from the perspective of learners, building a picture of how the 2023 assessment approach worked in practice. The research involved two stages — large-scale surveys, followed by a series of in-depth interviews.
- [**Practitioner Experiences report**](#) - Detailed research that aims to understand the experience of assessment in 2023 from the perspective of practitioners, building a picture of how the 2023 assessment approach worked in practice. The research involved two stages — large-scale surveys, followed by a series of in-depth interviews.
- [**Reflections of Senior Appointees and Qualification Development Teams**](#) - A report outlining the results of engagement with experienced subject specialists and SQA Qualification Development colleagues who support the delivery of National Courses. The purpose of this engagement was to gather participants' perspectives on how the assessment approach worked in practice, with particular focus on themes relating to standards.
- [**Technical Appendix**](#) – A report setting out methodology and approach to analysis for the work with learners, practitioners, senior appointees and SQA Qualification Development colleagues.
- [**Relationship Between Teacher Estimates and Results in Scotland**](#) - A report examining the relationships between awarded grades and estimates in exam years. SQA collects estimates of attainment from centres every year as part of the procedure for awarding National Courses. This analysis includes 2023, 2022, and the

three years prior to the pandemic (2017 to 2019) but does not include 2020 and 2021 when exams did not take place.

- [Dual Entry Analysis](#) - In the 2022–23 academic year, it was evident that there was a sizeable increase on recent years in the number of learners presented at both National 4 and National 5 for a single subject. This report explores the entry and attainment profiles of National 5 candidates and examines the impact of dual presentation over the five-year period 2019 to 2023.
- [National 5 Mathematics Analysis](#) - A to C attainment across most courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher were above pre-pandemic levels in 2023. A notable exception was A to C attainment for National 5 Mathematics, which was below pre-pandemic levels. While there are a number of factors that influence attainment, this report focuses on exploring the impact that presenting candidates for more than one Mathematics award has on attainment.
- [Learner Summary Report](#) - A summary of the findings for learners – outlining what learners themselves told us and what teachers, lecturers and senior examiners said.

In conclusion, the research findings have helped to build a picture of the experiences of learners, teachers, lecturers and senior examiners from across Scotland in 2023 as we continued to work through the long-term impact of the COVID pandemic on our education system. They reflect the diverse and often differing experiences and views of our education community.

Understanding the benefits and challenges of different arrangements is invaluable and creates a record and evidence-base to support continued dialogue and decision-making as Scotland continues to consider the scale and scope of education reform.

I hope you find this information interesting and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Yours sincerely

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