



Bulletin number 21

Unsuccessful Appeals Forms

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1 Introduction

SQA introduced a new set of Unsuccessful Appeals forms in 2005. The new forms were designed to standardise the existing set, both across subjects and across levels within the same subject, and to ensure that the forms were compatible with SQA policy. A decision was made to evaluate them to ensure that they effectively meet centres' needs. To do this, we devised two similar questionnaires.

The first was targeted at centres who had received the new forms, so we contacted all centres who had at least one unsuccessful stage two appeal from the 2005 examination diet. The centres were contacted by letter, and subsequently by e-mail, to maximise the response rate.

We received 172 responses from the 421 centres that had at least one unsuccessful stage two appeal. This gives us a response rate of 41%, which is relatively high for a survey of this nature. Of these responses, 154 came from local authority schools, 16 from independent schools, and two from further education colleges. This response means that there is a margin of error of around $\pm 5.5\%$ (95% confidence interval), so we can be confident that these results reflect the true opinion of centres.

The second questionnaire was sent out to SQA's NQ Qualification Managers and Principal Assessors for NQ subjects from Intermediate to Advanced Higher. We received 57 responses to this questionnaire, which was e-mailed to a total of 152 potential respondents. This gave a response rate of 38%. Because of the smaller sample size, the margin or error for these results is around $\pm 10\%$, again with a 95% confidence interval.

2 Centre questionnaire

While we asked centres for information on their centre type, the vast majority of respondents were, as expected, local authority schools. Breaking the results down by centre type showed no significant differences in attitudes by centre type, although the numbers of independent schools and further education colleges responding were small, and the margins of error on responses, broken down this way, are correspondingly very large. For this reason, in this section details are only given for all centres.

The questionnaire sent to centres was broken up into three sections for analysis. These are:

- ◆ Are the forms useful?
- ◆ Standardisation.

- ◆ Are the forms comprehensive?

Are the forms useful?

The first question we asked centres was whether they felt that the new Unsuccessful Appeals forms provided a better explanation of why the evidence was insufficient for a successful appeal. Of respondents, 13.2% felt that the new forms were much better, and 77.4% thought they were better than the previous forms. Only 6.9% and 2.5%, respectively, thought the new forms were worse or much worse than the old forms.

We also asked centres whether the forms would help them to improve the quality of evidence they submitted to SQA in future years. Of centres, 32% found the forms very useful for this purpose, and 54% found them useful. Only 10% and 5%, respectively, found them not very useful, and not at all useful.

Standardisation

We then asked centres whether the increased standardisation, both across subjects, and across different levels within the same subject, was useful. The detailed results are presented in the table below, but it is helpful to note that in both cases over 85% found the increased standardisation to be either useful or very useful.

Is the increased standardisation of forms useful:

- across subjects?
- across different levels within the same subject?

	Standardisation across subjects		Standardisation across levels	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Very useful	33	20.50%	37	22.98%
Useful	109	67.70%	102	63.35%
Not very useful	15	9.32%	16	9.94%
Of little use	4	2.48%	5	3.11%

Are the forms comprehensive?

When centres were asked whether the various sections of the forms were comprehensive, we found that the results for the sections on the validity and reliability of evidence were very similar, with around 10% stating they were very comprehensive, 70% comprehensive, 15% not very comprehensive, and less than 5% not at all comprehensive. The results for the subject-specific issues section were close to these, but with fewer centres saying this section was generally

comprehensive, and more opting for not very comprehensive and not at all comprehensive. Full results are provided in the table below.

Are the following sections of the forms comprehensive?

	Validity of evidence	Reliability of evidence	Subject-specific issues
Very comprehensive	11.95%	12.03%	9.33%
Comprehensive	69.81%	70.25%	60.67%
Not very comprehensive	14.47%	15.82%	21.33%
Not comprehensive at all	3.77%	1.92%	8.67%

Centres were asked to provide information on where they felt the forms were not fully comprehensive. Of those who responded, 63 centres (37%) took up this opportunity, although not all comments related to which parts of the forms were not fully comprehensive. Whilst it is difficult to analyse these systematically, the following responses came up on more than one occasion:

- ◆ Details should be provided on where exactly the weakness in the evidence lies.
- ◆ Tick-box form is impersonal/insufficient to show work has been re-examined.
- ◆ Forms use SQA jargon.
- ◆ Forms can be used inconsistently.
- ◆ Standardisation has reduced potential for subject-specific forms.

A number of these criticisms could only be remedied if SQA was willing to invest additional time and resources in this process. The most frequently raised issue is providing detail on the specific problem that prevented an appeal from being successful. This appears to be important to a number of centres.

3 QM/PA questionnaire

For this questionnaire, six responses were received from Qualifications Managers and 51 from Principal Assessors. The numbers received from QMs are too small to allow a valid breakdown by respondents’ role. Respondents were also asked to provide details of the subject area (Mathematics and Science, Language, Social Subjects, Business and Technology) in which they work. Where relevant, this breakdown is provided.

The questionnaire sent to QMs and PAs can be broken up into the same three sections for analysis:

Are the forms useful?

Again, the first question we asked QMs and PAs was whether they felt that the new Unsuccessful Appeals forms provided a better explanation of why the evidence was insufficient for a successful appeal. Of respondents, 1.9% felt that the new forms were much better, and 77.8% thought they were better than the previous forms. The new forms were thought to be worse and much worse than the old forms by 16.7% and 3.7%, respectively. Those working in Business and Technology and Language were more positive than those working in Social Subjects, Mathematics and Science.

Standardisation

We then asked QMs and PAs the same questions on standardisation, namely, whether the increased standardisation, both across subjects and across different levels within the same subject, was useful. The detailed results are presented in the table below. It is interesting to note that more respondents found standardisation across levels, but within the same subject, to be useful, than found standardisation across subjects helpful.

Is the increased standardisation of forms useful:

- (a) across subjects?
- (b) across different levels within the same subject?

	Standardisation across subjects		Standardisation across levels	
	Respondents	Percentage	Respondents	Percentage
Very useful	4	7.41%	9	16.67%
Useful	33	61.11%	37	68.52%
Not very useful	12	22.22%	5	9.26%
Of little use	5	9.26%	3	5.56%

Are the forms comprehensive?

When QMs and PAs were asked whether the various sections of the forms were comprehensive, we found that the results for the sections on the validity and reliability of evidence were very similar. Around 8% found both sections very comprehensive, while 78% found them comprehensive. The others were split between not very comprehensive and not comprehensive at all, with most opting for not very comprehensive.

The figures for the sections on subject-specific issues were somewhat lower than those for the other two sections, although a clear majority of those surveyed found this part of the form to be comprehensive. It should also be noted that 70% of centres, at whom the Unsuccessful Appeals forms are targeted, found this section to be comprehensive or very comprehensive.

Are the following sections of the forms comprehensive?

	Validity of evidence	Reliability of evidence	Subject-specific issues
Very comprehensive	7.55%	7.69%	2.04%
Comprehensive	77.36%	78.85%	57.14%
Not very comprehensive	13.21%	9.62%	34.69%
Not comprehensive at all	1.89%	3.85%	6.12%

QMs and PAs were asked to provide information on where they felt the forms were not fully comprehensive. Of those who responded, 33 (58%) took up this opportunity, although not all comments related to which parts of the forms were not fully comprehensive. There were few differences across subjects, although there were not many comments from those working in Language.

The main issue raised was the inflexibility of the tick-box forms. A significant number of those surveyed sought the reintroduction of a space for comment or explanation, and some suggested that the tick-box system forced them to select the closest explanation available where no explanation fitted the particular case precisely. Other issues raised by more than one respondent included:

- ◆ The value or otherwise of differentiating between validity and reliability of evidence.
- ◆ Difficulties in dealing with unusual cases.
- ◆ Standardisation has reduced potential for subject-specific forms.

4 Conclusions

We can conclude that the changes made to the Unsuccessful Appeals forms have generally been positively received by both centres and SQA staff. Centres and staff welcomed the increased standardisation, and felt that the new forms were relatively comprehensive. There were some concerns about the sections for subject-specific issues, although centres may not be aware that individual QMs had an opportunity to contribute to this section of the form.

The main criticism of the forms was that the tick-box approach, with no opportunity for examining teams to make comments, can be overly restrictive, and that centres would derive greater benefit if this was changed. While there are benefits in allowing more detailed information to be provided, the tick-box approach was adopted to increase consistency, and to ensure adherence to SQA's policies. SQA considers that these reasons outweigh the benefits that would be achieved from allowing comments, and no change is therefore recommended.

It is recommended that the Project Manager responsible for this area reviews the individual comments made by centres and staff, and considers whether any of them entail changes to one or more forms. Further to this, it is recommended that the Project Manager consults with Qualifications Managers annually to determine whether changes to the subject-specific issues sections are required.

There would also be benefits in producing guidance on Unsuccessful Appeals forms, both for Examiners and centres, to ensure that there is no confusion about why appeals are refused.

Given the results of the two questionnaires, carrying out interviews with specific centres would serve no significant purpose, and it is therefore recommended that no further evaluative activities are carried out at present