

FOI 2627 FOI 048 Emails**Attachments**

Ref	Email Date/Time	Email Title	Note
1	19 December 2024 15:22	FOI24/25-155 Freedom of Information Full Response	Previous response to FOI, redacted
2	12 March 2025 09:59	RE: Media query - Follow-up - Alternative Venue Guidance	Same as #1
3	11 March 2025 11:42	Re: Media query - Follow-up - Alternative Venue Guidance	Redacted notes of meeting: 'Alternative Venue – Meeting with centre representatives; 15th June 2023'
4	10 March 2025 09:30	Re: For consideration/approval please: Correspondence - Alternative Venues - Dance/Cheer world championships in Florida 2025	Letter to Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP
5	10 January 2025 12:24	SCS note 09-01-25	Note of meeting between SQA and SCS, prepared by SQA
6	24 January 2025 08:36	Re: Alt venue statement	Joint SQA-SCS Statement
7	27 January 2025 11:19	For information/consideration: AV MSP Meeting - Briefing Note	Briefing note for Chief Executive in preparation for meeting with MSP.
8	23 January 2025 09:56	Re: Briefing template for meeting with Mr Alex Cole-Hamilton	Same as #7
9	15 March 2025 10:27	Media and Parliamentary Coverage - Saturday 15 March 2025	Press cutting from TES
10	10 March 2025 11:16	Media Update - Monday 10 March	Press cutting from The Scotsman
11	13 March 2025 10:37	Media Update Thursday 13 March	Press cutting from Edinburgh Evening News
12	17 March 2025 11:49	News Update Monday 17 March	Press cutting from TESS

From: FOI

Sent: 19 December 2024 15:22

To:

Subject: FOI24/25-155 Freedom of Information Full Response

Dear

Thank you for your request for information dated 27/11/24.

You asked SQA for the following information:

1. The total number of students who have applied for alternative assessment venues in the past three years.
2. A breakdown of the reasons provided by students or their schools for requesting alternative venues.
3. Any reports, minutes, or communications that detail the justification for introducing these recent changes to alternative venue guidelines including the meeting held with SportCheer Scotland.

SQA's response:

The information requested is contained within the attached document. Please note that the names and identifying information of SQA staff below Head of Service level and non-SQA staff have been removed under section 38 (1)(b) as this is considered personal information. Other information contained within the emails has also been redacted as it was considered out of scope of the request.

If you are not satisfied with the way in which we have dealt with your request for information made under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, you have the right to request a review of our actions and decisions in relation to that request. A request for a review must be made within 40 working days of the original decision, should include the name and address of the applicant for correspondence, the request for information to which the review refers and the matter giving rise to the dissatisfaction. Review requests should be sent by email to foi@sqa.org.uk, or by post to:

Freedom of Information Officer

Scottish Qualifications Authority

The Optima Building

58 Robertson Street

GLASGOW

G2 8DQ

The request will be acknowledged, and a review will be carried out by a senior official within SQA who has not been involved in the original response. Their decision will be sent to you within 20 working days of receipt of the request. If you are still dissatisfied, you have a right to apply to the Scottish Information Commissioner for a decision, which you can do using this link www.itspublicknowledge.info/Appeal. Should you wish to appeal against this decision, you have the right to appeal to the Court of Session on a point of law only.

Further details are available on the Commissioner's [website](#). The Commissioner's contact details are as follows:

The Scottish Information Commissioner

Kinburn Castle

Doubledykes Road

St Andrews

KY16 9DS

Tel: 01334 464610

E-mail: enquiries@itspublicknowledge.info

Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] | Manaidsear Riaghladh Fiosrachaidh
Strategic Planning & Governance, Corporate Strategy & Business Development

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 12 March 2025 09:59

To: Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>; Richard Pidgeon <Richard.Pidgeon@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: RE: Media query - Follow-up - Alternative Venue Guidance

Hi Jean – I cleverly shared the wrong file with you yesterday – here's the one the FOI have supplied...

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] **Out of scope**

[REDACTED]

**

From: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 11 March 2025 11:42

To: Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; Richard Pidgeon <Richard.Pidgeon@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>;

[REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Media query - Follow-up - Alternative Venue Guidance

Thanks [REDACTED] and Jean.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Out of scope

Consultation refers to this engagement which we can evidence that informed the decision making not a formalised SQA consultation that sought views over a set period/adheres to specific public body consulting rules etc.

Hope this helps.

Cat

**

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 10 March 2025 12:12

To: Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; John Booth <john.booth@sqa.org.uk>; Catriona Campbell <catriona.campbell@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: Richard Pidgeon <richard.pidgeon@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: RE: Media coverage - Cheerleading

OK – revised version for clarity...

‘SQA met with representative of SportCheer Scotland in March 2024 as part of its consultation on its alternative venue guidance. This, together with the feedback from teachers, lecturers and other stakeholders, informed the changes to the guidance, which were then shared with schools and colleges in May 2024, ahead of the 2024-25 academic year.

‘The updated guidance states that if a learner has been selected to represent their country in an international sporting event by their sports’ governing body, they must provide written confirmation from that governing body.’

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] **Out of scope**

Regards,

[REDACTED]

**

From: John Booth <John.Booth@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 10 March 2025 10:55

To: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: RE: Media coverage - Cheerleading

Thanks [REDACTED]

There was a claim in the Scotsman that Cheer Scotland were not told about the changes until Oct 24. The timeline shows that wasn't the case so need to ensure that is corrected in any follow-up.

John

John Booth

Interim Chief Executive, SQA

**

From: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 10 March 2025 09:30

To: Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Re: For consideration/approval please: Correspondence - Alternative Venues - Dance/Cheer world championships in Florida 2025

Hi Jean

I've updated the letter to A-CH further to the detail below.

I'd be grateful if you had time to catch up on this when you have a free moment. Perhaps if the HoS call finishes earlier later?

Thanks

Cat

t: 0345 213 6799 | e: jean.blair@sqa.org.uk | w: <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

Scottish Qualifications Authority

24 Wester Shawfair, Lowden, Dalkeith, Midlothian EH22 1FD

**

From: Catriona Campbell

Sent: 06 March 2025 08:59

To: Jean Blair

Cc: Gill Mann ; [REDACTED]

Subject: For consideration/approval please: Correspondence - Alternative Venues - Dance/Cheer world championships in Florida 2025

Hi Jean

NQ Policy received the below enquiry from SG which Gill and I have been working on a response to. We would like to go with the following, which has also been reviewed by [REDACTED] in Comms, if you are ok to approve this?

Our alternative venue guidance remains in place for 2025 and beyond. We know that the revised timetable has introduced the risk of financial loss for a small number of learners who booked holidays or overseas travel based on the previous exam dates. We'll provide updated EECCS guidance to support these candidates by the end of March.

These candidates can ask their centre to use EECCS if, following the change to the timetable, they have exams on dates when they previously didn't and these exams fall during holidays or overseas travel that was booked before 3 February, when the timetable changed. This includes candidates who are competing in overseas competitions. Please note that candidates will need to provide evidence that their booking was made prior to the timetable changing.

This extension to the service is for the 2025 diet only due to the timetable update.

Thanks

Cat

From: [REDACTED]@gov.scot

Sent: 14 February 2025 16:35

To: Steve Borley <Steve.Borley@sqa.org.uk>; Gill Mann <Gill.Mann@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk; [REDACTED]@gov.scot

Subject: RE: Correspondence - Alternative Venues - Dance/Cheer world championships in Florida 2025

Hi all,

I hope you are well and having a good week.

Just a quick email to follow up on the below meeting on alternative venue guidance for pupils wishing to compete in the world championships in Florida this year, to understand if there are any updates or changes following the meeting that would be helpful for us to be aware of?

Many thanks in advance,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] | Policy Advisor | National Qualifications| Education Reform Directorate | Scottish Government | Area 2B North | Victoria Quay | Edinburgh | EH6 6QQ |

★★

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 06 March 2025 17:36

To: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; Catriona Campbell
<Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>
Subject: FW: Fwd: Media inquiry

Hi [REDACTED],

It's [REDACTED] from the comms team at SQA – here's a note of the reply we're going to issue to The Scotsman.

++++

A SQA spokesperson said:

'SQA informed schools and colleges of changes to its alternative venue guidance in May 2024. The updated guidance came into effect for the 2024-25 academic year, following consultation and feedback from teachers, lecturers, the Scottish cheer and performance cheer governing body, SportCheer Scotland, and other stakeholders.

'The updated guidance states that if a learner has been selected to represent their country in an international sporting event by their sports' governing body, they must provide written confirmation to their school or college from that governing body.'

- ENDS –

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If you wish to send your own reply, that's fine, but I'll be getting this to The Scotsman in the next few minutes.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Scottish Qualifications Authority

**

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 06 March 2025 14:17
To: [REDACTED] [sportcheerScotland]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Fwd: Media inquiry

Hi [REDACTED]

We have had an enquiry from the same source come in today. If you can hang fire for the moment, [REDACTED] is drafting a response based on information we have published already (including the shared statement) which we will share with you shortly. It will obviously be up to

you if you'd like to respond directly as well, but if you're happy to be cited in our response then it should take away the need for you to respond directly.

I don't think I have a phone number for you, but if who'd like to discuss I'm available on [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Operations (NQ QA)

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: Thursday, March 6, 2025 13:36

To: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Fwd: Media inquiry

Hi [REDACTED]

Let me check with our media team and get back to you.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Sent: Thursday, March 6, 2025 12:54

To: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk

Subject: Fwd: Media inquiry

Hi [REDACTED]

Please see email below.

We are aware you have been contacted with a similar request and are reaching out to establish if you will be commenting and if you have any objections to us using the agreed joint statement?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SportCheer Scotland

===== Forwarded Message =====

From : [REDACTED]@jpress.co.uk

To:

[REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk

Date : Thu, 06 Mar 2025 12:24:15 +0100

Subject : Media inquiry

===== Forwarded Message =====

===== Forwarded Message =====

Hi folks

My name is [REDACTED] and I'm the education correspondent at The Scotsman.

I've contacted the SQA about this today, but I thought I better flag it to you as well, in case SportCheerScotland wishes to comment at all.

I've spoken to some coaches from Scottish cheerleading clubs who are unhappy with the SQA over changes to alternative venue arrangements for this year's exams, which they say were communicated late and mean members of their teams are having to decide whether to miss their exams or pull out of a world championships event in Florida in May.

I wanted to flag the following quote from Alex Cole-Hamilton, the Scottish Lib Dem leader

He said: "This feels like a real injustice. Many of these athletes have spent years in training to get to this stage but now they are faced with either missing exams or missing out on representing their country.

"It seems as if the SQA and SportCheer Scotland are being unhelpful and inflexible. If it's possible for some athletes to complete exams abroad then it seems like there is no good reason why this cannot be extended to others in similar circumstances.

"I want to see talented athletes given the chance to thrive both competitively and academically. If the SQA won't see sense then perhaps it is time for the Education Secretary or the sports minister to have a word in their ear."

As I said, I have asked SQA if it wishes to respond. If SportCheerScotland wishes to say anything for inclusion in an article I am writing please let me know by tomorrow.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Education Correspondent

The Scotsman / Scotland on Sunday

[REDACTED]
**

From: [REDACTED] [journalist]

Sent: 06 March 2025 11:10

To: Media Enquiries ; Richard Pidgeon ; [REDACTED]

Subject: Cheerleaders

Hi folks

I've been speaking to the coaches from some Scottish cheerleading teams who are unhappy with the SQA over changes to alternative venue arrangements for this year's exams, which they say were communicated late and mean members of their teams are having to decide whether to miss their exams or pull out of a world championships event in Florida in May. They report that alternative arrangements have been put in place for cheerleading teams from Scotland since at least 2011. I understand complaints have been lodged with the SQA and the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Alex Cole-Hamilton has said the SQA is being "unhelpful and inflexible".

Please see below and let me know if the SQA wishes to comment...

[REDACTED], Capital Allstars, said:

"It has had quite a significant impact, just on our sport alone, but I'm certain in others as well.

"I would say 90 per cent of athletes who compete at these prestigious events are female as well, and I don't need to tell you there are already limited opportunities for girls in sport, especially at elite level, so it has been pretty significant, and upsetting and stressing for those athletes to have been able to take up these opportunities, and then to have that taken away from them.

"It's terrible really and has been within very limited consultation within the community. The decision has just been made by the SQA on the back of what they say is feedback from schools, centres.

"It's quite significantly impacted us with regards future opportunities for a lot of the girls in our club, and others across Scotland who have been involved in many years.

"We knew straight away because of the dates that there would be interference with exams. When the exam timetable came out in September we obviously knew who at that point was impacted.

"We were told by the schools we had to wait for the alternative venue service to open in October, and then on 22 October, which is already two months into the academic year, the SQA

formally released updated guidance, which excluded our athletes from being able to do their exams in an alternative venue.

“By that point, based on a 10 year precedent that had been set, we had already heavily financially committed to the trip, to the point where these athletes from my team are not in a position not to travel. They are too financially invested, it would be a huge financial loss. They are not able to turn back now and not attend the trip.

“They (SQA) are just point blank refusing to allow our athletes and others from Scottish teams to utilise any of these options. Effectively what they are saying is that nothing should have been booked without having confirmation from the SQA or whoever that the alternative venue service could be used, but all the arrangements were made in good faith based on the precedent of the last 10-plus years, where athletes in cheerleading have been able to attend the specific event we’re going to have been able to use the alternative venue service in the past.

“To be honest, moving forward, if that is the case and there is absolutely nothing we can do - because the SQA have made it clear they are not interested in changing their viewpoint at all - so that is something we’re going to have to adapt to and deal with going forward.

“However, the fact that they made these changes in the middle of an academic year - it was October when the guidance was formally released, not even on a public forum, to centres/schools, via SQA coordinators, which is a private platform which only the SQA coordinator has access to.

“We won our bid back in May. The competition is in May 2025. We need to make these arrangements, we have deadlines in terms of entry fees to pay, and things like that.

“Basically any option was basically stripped from them, and the SQA has taken no accountability, no acknowledgement of the fact this was communicated way too late. And now are just accepting that these kids are not going to be able to sit their exams.

“At least one of my athletes has had to visit the doctor multiple times due to the detriment this has had to their mental health.

“It’s going to be a regression in a lot of the progress we have made as a sport, as an industry, to get ourselves established as a sport, and to work towards that Olympic status to then have basically all of the pathways for progression taken away from us, because our examination period falls within the time of the events, it has just been really difficult.

, Black Diamond Cheerleaders

“We have had an absolute nightmare and we’ve had to take two of the girls out of the team. They worked so hard to get this bid, they are two of our strongest members, they were in the team two prior as well, and then at such short notice we had to take them out.

“They lost deposits. It has just been an absolute nightmare. They are absolutely gutted. It is heart-breaking for us to see as well, to tell them they’ve to come out of the team, they are crying their eyes out, their parents are gutted.

"Taking those two out of the team made a huge impact. The dynamics of a team, they were a huge part of that team. We kind of had to start again. It has been really tough, and I thought we were supposed to be promoting young women in sport, and this was a great opportunity to represent their country, and it has just been taken away from them.

"I think the biggest thing out of this is the timescale. We got told in October that they couldn't go, but this has been booked since June. We've done it years prior and there has been no issue, then all of a sudden, we got this put upon us.

"It's not even the policy, it's the timescale of it. If they brought this in and said, 'right from next year, this is happening', then we all would have taken it on board and would have had time to prepare.

"But instead we've had to have kids come out mid-season, and they are devastated, really upset. It has just been an absolute nightmare.

"Not everybody is academic, and obviously they find their passion in other places. One of the girls that has had to pull out of the team wants to become a coach in the future, and I feel like her career goals are being pushed aside.

Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP said: "This feels like a real injustice. Many of these athletes have spent years in training to get to this stage but now they are faced with either missing exams or missing out on representing their country.

"It seems as if the SQA and SportCheer Scotland are being unhelpful and inflexible. If it's possible for some athletes to complete exams abroad then it seems like there is no good reason why this cannot be extended to others in similar circumstances.

"I want to see talented athletes given the chance to thrive both competitively and academically. If the SQA won't see sense then perhaps it is time for the Education Secretary or the sports minister to have a word in their ear."

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Education Correspondent
The Scotsman / Scotland on Sunday

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: 06 March 2025 13:36

To: Catriona Campbell ; Richard Pidgeon ; [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Fwd: Media inquiry

Hi [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] . Out of scope

Are you aware of any enquiries from the Scotsman? It might be good to liaise with Sport Cheer Scotland on a response?

■

**

Sent: 27 January 2025 11:19

To: Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: ■@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: For information/consideration: AV MSP Meeting - Briefing Note

Hi Jean

As discussed, here is the briefing note that I pulled together which focuses on the constituent's queries and our responses to them.

Appreciate we have time in on Thursday to discuss if the meeting does still go ahead but please let me know meantime if you have any questions.

Thanks

Cat

Cat Campbell

Head of Quality Assurance (NQ)

**

From: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 23 January 2025 09:56

To: ■@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Briefing template for meeting with Mr Alex Cole-Hamilton

Hi ■

Here is the briefing note ahead of my meeting with Fiona on Monday.

■ **Out of scope**

please let me know if you need anything else or if Fiona requires any clarification at all.

Many thanks,

Cat

From: ■

Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 10:19

To: Catriona Campbell

Subject: Briefing template for meeting with Mr Alex Cole-Hamilton

Hi Cat,

I have arranged a meeting with Fiona for Monday 27 January at 3pm and attached the briefing template we use for any briefings for Fiona.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require anything further.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 20 December 2024 09:00

To: [REDACTED] <president@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Cc: Alternative Venues <alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Conflicting information

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks for getting back to me and sharing the message from the 21st.

Would 4pm on 9 Jan be ok for you? And are you happy to use MS Teams for the meeting?

On the agenda for the meeting I suggest:

- Recognition of events and requirements for access to alt ven service
- Communication with stakeholders 2025 service
- 2026

Please let me know if this fits with what you would like to discuss and if there are any other agenda points you'd like added.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] [sportcheerscotland]

Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 17:21

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Alternative Venues ; [REDACTED]
[sportcheerscotland]

Subject: Re: Conflicting information

Hi

When we received the update on October 21st, it specifically referenced the ICU, which is the information we have since shared with our members.

Given the timing of the update, we did not expect any significant changes this year and, therefore, our recommendation for this year would be to allow all events, considering the financial commitments made by the end of October.

Please find the email below for your reference:

Hello [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

We hope you are well.

This is just a quick email to share the guidance on the Alternative venue service that SQA has recently published for centres for this session (2024-2025).

As discussed with you, you will see that we now require there to be a national selection process and a letter confirming this from the sport governing body. Learners will not be granted an alternative venue request without this. We appreciate your support in providing this letter for your eligible athletes and sharing the message that alternative venue requests can only be provided for athletes who have been selected to represent the National Team at the ICU World Championships.

The service opens to requests from centres today (21stOctober) and will close on the 12th March.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any queries.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

Recognised Competitions

As a competitive sport, we recognise all competitions as valuable opportunities for athletes to compete, but our official World Championships is the ICU World

Championship. The ICU also recognises the following events as official on their calendar:

- ICU World Championships: April 24th - 26th
- IASF Worlds: April 25th - 28th
- ICC World Cup: April 28th - 29th

I have contacted the ICU today to clarify their stance on the Allstar Worlds and The Summit.

We currently select our national team for the ICU, and any bid teams we select as the national team also qualify for IASF/ICC national selection. We are also considering a national selection process for club teams for IASF and ICC events.

We would be happy to meet in January. Does the 9th work for you?

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SportCheer Scotland

c/o Centre 81, 2-16 Braes Avenue,

Whitecrook, Clydebank, Scotland, G81 1DP

www.sportcheerscotland.org.uk

SportCheerScotlandOfficial

[REDACTED]

---- On Thu, 19 Dec 2024 12:35:04 +0000 [REDACTED] wrote ----

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks for your message. I have discussed with [REDACTED] and we think it would be beneficial to have a discussion in January about this. I can well understand you are having some difficult conversations and we are keen to ensure that you have a full understanding of the SQA requirements to support you. Would you have any availability for w/c 6 Jan?

In terms of SportCheer Scotland's recognition of events, our understanding based on contact with yourselves is that:

- SportCheer Scotland is the governing body for Cheer and Performance Cheer (Dance) in Scotland and is affiliated to the International Cheer Union (ICU), European Cheer Union (ECU) and SportCheer UK. The International Cheer Union (ICU) is the recognised world governing body of Cheer (Cheerleading & Performance Cheer).
- There are two recognised competitions backed by the SportCheer Scotland/the ICU:
 - o - ICU – The Worlds
 - o - ISF – Cheerleading Cup
- Allstars and Summit are not recognised by SportCheer Scotland/the ICU.

If there is any inaccuracy with this please let me know to support our understanding. SQA has no role in determining which events are backed by a sporting governing body and can't advise what events SportCheer Scotland recognises. To the best of my knowledge the only thing SQA has said directly regarding recognition of these events is a reply to yourself in November where we stated "we understand that the recognised competitions backed by governing body, CheerSport Scotland [sic], are completed by 29 April" which is a reference to the ISC and ISF events in 2025. I don't think that can be read as providing direction about recognition and it is not a line that we've used in any correspondence with other parties or any guidance.

Our eligibility requirement for the alternative venue service is as below for sporting events. I've highlighted what I think are the key points:

1. Official recognition:

- The competition, such as a European or World Championships, must be officially recognised by the national governing body or relevant sports authority.

2. Official representation and selection:

- Learners must be officially selected by their country's national governing body or relevant sports authority to compete in international sporting events, ensuring the event's legitimacy and significance
- Learners selected by clubs or individual choice to attend an event are not eligible for the service.

3. Confirmation letter:

- A letter must be provided from the same authority to confirm:
 - recognition of the event as a major international sporting competition.

— selection was made by the governing body.

Therefore, there are two points that a letter would need to clarify: the first is recognition of the event; and the second is confirmation that selection for the event was made by the national body.

To take an example from another sport, the SFA might recognise a European club football event, but competitors would not be eligible for our service as they are not selected by the SFA. Whereas competitors in a national representative team, selected under the direction of the SFA, would satisfy both points.

There may be vagaries for how selection will work for different sports, so we are more than happy to discuss this if there are any ambiguities around selection.

If you can let me know if a meeting in early Jan would be helpful from your perspective and, if so, a good time for you.

Kind regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Operations (NQ QA)

From: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Sent: 19 December 2024 09:57

To: Alternative Venues <alternative.venues@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
<vicepresident@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Conflicting information

Hi

I hope this message finds you all well.

We are reaching out for further clarification regarding the recent correspondence we've received, which has caused some confusion within our organisation.

One of our members has been in contact with SQA and was told the following by the SQA.

You mention SQA specifying what would be considered an event within the guidelines, however, SQA has no role in determining whether a sporting body recognises an event and has provided no direction regarding any specific events to any governing body. If a national body is able to provide a letter and the learner's school or college is content to submit a request, it will be considered by SQA'

We are trying to adhere to the SQA guidelines and communicate consistent information to our members. However, there appears to be a discrepancy between the messages we have received, and this is causing significant confusion and upset and a lack of trust within our community.

Could you please confirm whether the ICU Championships are the only events recognised, or if there is flexibility to consider the other events based on the above statement.

We would greatly appreciate your guidance on how we should proceed in advocating for event recognition within the current framework.

Thank you for your time and assistance in resolving this matter. We look forward to your response and a clearer understanding of the SQA's stance.

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SportCheer Scotland

c/o Centre 81, 2-16 Braes Avenue,

Whitecrook, Clydebank, Scotland, G81 1DP

www.sportcheerscotland.org.uk

SportCheerScotlandOfficial

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 10 January 2025 12:24

To: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: SCS note 09-01-25

Hi [REDACTED]

Salient points from yesterday's meeting. Tried to capture the highlights.

Kind regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Operations - Logistics & Customer Engagement

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 24 January 2025 08:36

To: Info <info@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Alt venue statement

Hi [REDACTED]

Please find attached.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

From: Info

Sent: Wednesday, January 22, 2025 19:32

To: [REDACTED] [SQA]

Subject: Re: Alt venue statement

Hi

Thank you, could we please have a copy on headed paper?

Kind Regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SportCheer Scotland

c/o Centre 81, 2-16 Braes Avenue,

Whitecrook, Clydebank, Scotland, G81 1DP

www.sportcheerscotland.org.uk

----- On Wed, 22 Jan 2025 08:40:25 +0000 [REDACTED] wrote -----

Hi [REDACTED]

Thank you. I have amended the typo. I've omitted reference to IASF based on what you say.

Happy for this to be shared with any of your members or corresponders.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

From: Info <info@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Sent: Tuesday, January 21, 2025 08:25

To: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Re: Alt venue statement

Hi [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] **Out of scope**

Please see points below for consideration:

1. There is a typo of SDS, the abbreviation would be SCS.
2. We, SCS (SportCheer Scotland) do not currently select the teams competing at IASF although many of our National Team athletes compete at this competition as well as ICU. Can we clarify if we would be permitted to provide letters to all athletes competing at IASF or only those on the national team?

Thanks for your support and patience around this.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

SportCheer Scotland

c/o Centre 81, 2-16 Braes Avenue,
Whitecrook, Clydebank, Scotland, G81 1DP
www.sportcheerscotland.org.uk

---- On Wed, 15 Jan 2025 10:58:19 +0000 [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk> wrote --
--

Hi [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Apologies, I sent an earlier draft in error. Please see the current version.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] [SQA]

Sent: Wednesday, January 15, 2025 10:29

To: [REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sportcheerscotland.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Alt venue statement

Hi [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Thank you for the meeting last week. As discussed, please see attached a proposed statement that you can share and use to respond to queries. Please review and let me know if you would like to see any changes before it is finalised.

Many thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Operations (NQ QA)

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 20 December 2024 08:23

To: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Fw: Conflicting information

Hi Cat

Just for your information.

I wasn't aware of [REDACTED] message quoted below which perhaps explains some of the correspondence we've had stating that SQA have decided not to recognise events. It's can be read as a direction. I think the intent was to ensure that they understand what it means for Cheer based on our understanding.

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, December 19, 2024 17:21

To: [REDACTED]

Cc: Alternative Venues ; [REDACTED]

Subject: Re: Conflicting information

**** AS ABOVE CHAIN ****

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 15 March 2025 10:27

To: ExecutiveTeam <ExecutiveTeam@sqa.org.uk>; External Affairs
<external.affairs@sqa.org.uk>; Richard Pidgeon <Richard.Pidgeon@sqa.org.uk>; Shirley Rogers
<Shirley.Rogers@sqa.org.uk>; Stuart McLaren <Stuart.McLaren@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Media and Parliamentary Coverage - Saturday 15 March 2025

Good morning,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Out of scope

Media mentions – SQA

- Cheerleading
- TESS – online - ‘Cheerleaders signal a problem with SQA exam venue rules’ – quotes from an Edinburgh Cheer and Dance coach and SportCheer Scotland. Also mentioned that “School SQA coordinators have reports that this guidance puts them in a tricky position”.

Many thanks,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Communications and Engagement, Communications Directorate

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 10 March 2025 11:16

To: *Internal Circulation List*

Cc: External Affairs <external.affairs@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Media Update - Monday 10 March

Good morning,

SQA

The Scotsman have an article on Cheerleading / alternative venues - **Heartbreak for Scottish cheerleaders forced by SQA to choose between exams and Florida world championships**. Our quote has been used and we will request corrections.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

■ [REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Out of scope

Thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 12 March 2025 09:53

To: *Internal Circulation List*

Cc: External Affairs <external.affairs@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Media Update - Wednesday 12 March

SQA

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Out of scope

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Out of scope

Further coverage of the Cheerleading story, with our quote and that of SportCheer Scotland included:

- Daily Record online – ‘[Crushed Scots teen will 'miss opportunity of lifetime' over SQA exam rule change](#)’
- Edinburgh Live online – ‘[Crushed Edinburgh mum says daughter must choose 'exams or sport' due to SQA rule](#)’

[REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Out of scope

Thanks

[REDACTED]

External Affairs Officer

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 13 March 2025 10:37

To: *Internal Circulation List*

Cc: External Affairs <external.affairs@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Media Update Thursday 13 March

Good morning,

SQA

Evening News online and on page 23 – ‘**SQA leading cheerleaders a merry dance**’, an opinion column by Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Out of scope

year. He will serve for a period of up to five months until a new substantive chair is appointed.

Thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 17 March 2025 11:49

To: *Internal Circulation List*

Cc: External Affairs <external.affairs@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: News Update Monday 17 March

Good morning,

(please excuse if you are receiving this a second time as we have had an emailing issue)

SQA

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Out of scope

TESS online - ‘**Cheerleaders signal a problem with SQA exam venue rules**’ – including quotes from an Edinburgh Cheer and Dance coach and SportCheer Scotland. Also mentioned that “School SQA coordinators have reports that this guidance puts them in a tricky position”.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Out of
scope

Thanks

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**

From: John Booth <john.booth@qualifications.gov.scot>

Sent: 06 January 2025 16:45

To: [REDACTED]@qualifications.gov.scot>; Richard Pidgeon
<richard.pidgeon@qualifications.gov.scot>

Cc: [REDACTED]@qualifications.gov.scot>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@qualifications.gov.scot>

Subject: RE: FOR APPROVAL - Media response - Original 106 - Alternative Venues / Cheerleading

Thanks [REDACTED] - have adapted the first a little to emphasise the feedback point.

[REDACTED] . Out of scope

[REDACTED] Out of scope

John

John Booth

Director of Communications, SQA

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 06 January 2025 16:34

To: John Booth <John.Booth@sqa.org.uk>; Richard Pidgeon <Richard.Pidgeon@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: FOR APPROVAL - Media response - Original 106 - Alternative Venues / Cheerleading

Folks, [REDACTED]

We've had a query in re. changes to the Alternative Venue guidance as issued to centres back in May 2024. The question has come in from Original 106 / Kingdom FM, and the reporter has a link to dance / cheerleading teams, and is asking about the changes to the guidance / when they were made / will we change them back etc...

Draft response – which has been agreed with [REDACTED], and Catriona Campbell...

+++++

'SQA's Alternative Venues service supports candidates who, in exceptional circumstances, cannot sit their exams in schools or colleges. We updated our guidance for the 2024-25 academic session based on feedback received from schools and colleges.

'The new guidance states that if a learner has been selected to represent their country in a sporting event, they must provide written confirmation from their sport's governing body.

'Similarly, if a learner must attend an event crucial to their academic or career progression, scheduled at the same time as one or more of their exams, they must provide written confirmation from the relevant educational institution.

'While we appreciate the dedication of learners involved in cheerleading and dance teams, the Alternative Venues service is only available to those who meet the updated eligibility criteria.'

ENDS

+++++

Grateful if you could sign-off as aiming to get back to the reporter by 17:00.

Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Scottish Qualifications Authority

★ ★

From: John Booth <john.booth@qualifications.gov.scot>

Sent: 10 March 2025 10:55

To: [REDACTED]@qualifications.gov.scot>; Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: Cat Campbell <cat.campbell@qualifications.gov.scot>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@qualifications.gov.scot>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: RE: Media coverage - Cheerleading

Thanks [REDACTED]

There was a claim in the Scotsman that Cheer Scotland were not told about the changes until Oct 24. The timeline shows that wasn't the case so need to ensure that is corrected in any follow-up.

John

John Booth

Interim Chief Executive, SQA

From: [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Sent: 10 March 2025 10:09

To: John Booth <John.Booth@sqa.org.uk>; Jean Blair <Jean.Blair@sqa.org.uk>

Cc: Catriona Campbell <Catriona.Campbell@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>; [REDACTED]@sqa.org.uk>

Subject: Media coverage - Cheerleading

Morning folks,

Following The Scotsman's query last Thursday, they've ran their piece on Cheerleading / alternative venues. Our quote has been used.

For noting – here's a copy of the AV timeline [REDACTED] has provided - [Alt ven timeline.docx](#) {NB: link no longer works}

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Scottish Qualifications Authority

★ ★

