

# **Perceptions of Assessment Standards in Scotland: Questionnaire with Stakeholders**

## **Report 3 of 4**

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# **1 Executive summary**

## **1.1 About the project**

Following the public reaction to grading of the summer 2020 National Qualifications in Scotland, SQA launched a broad research programme to investigate and engage with stakeholders' views regarding qualifications in Scotland. This project forms part of the programme of work. The Perceptions of Assessment Standards in Scotland project specifically investigated stakeholders' views on fairness and standards of qualifications in 2020 and 2021. An empirical study of the perceptions of stakeholders and their reports on what influenced their views was conducted through focus groups with 82 stakeholders, a questionnaire with 918 stakeholders and a telephone survey with 103 employers. The aims of the work were to understand views of qualifications in Scottish society and to use this to inform better assessment policy-making and communication with stakeholders. The research was conducted by teams from the University of Glasgow, the University of Oxford and SQA.

## **1.2 This report**

The current report focuses upon the questionnaire study with 918 stakeholders who completed the entire survey. One third of respondents were learners, one third were educational practitioners and over a quarter were parents and carers. A small number of employers and other stakeholders also participated. Almost 60 percent of respondents were associated with state secondary schools, one third were associated with independent schools and a smaller proportion (7%) were associated with further education colleges. Respondents were from a range of local authorities across Scotland. This report presents the statistical analysis of the findings of the questionnaire and the qualitative analysis of the free text responses from participants.

## **1.3 This research**

A link to the electronic questionnaire was distributed to half of all secondary schools and all colleges in Scotland in late November 2021 (when the appeals process was complete) and remained live until the beginning of the school holidays. Most of the questions were closed, but there were some text response questions, to allow stakeholders more freedom to express their views. In addition to demographic characteristics, topics on the questionnaire included standards, trust and communication, teacher assessment, the future of assessment in Scotland and lessons learned from the pandemic. These themes were also used in the analysis of the focus group data, presented in report 2 of this series.

## 1.4 Findings

- ◆ A general message from stakeholders was that the National Qualification system should be learner-focused, providing information for learners and involving learners in design of any future reform.
- ◆ Standards were generally viewed as representing learners' performances. However, there were contradictory views, with two in five stakeholders considering that grades represented not just performance on the assessment, but an underlying ability. Approximately half of respondents considered that standards represented the national statistics as well as learners' performances.
- ◆ Most respondents believed that national standards had been different during the pandemic, but views differed as to whether they were less demanding. This issue is complex, as learners were grappling with the effects of the pandemic upon their education, and this will have impacted upon their opportunities to learn. Responses were therefore nuanced as well as variable regarding the comparability of standards over time during the pandemic.
- ◆ Only one third of respondents indicated that they did not trust the assessment system in 2021. At the time of the survey there was a reported decline in trust in SQA.
- ◆ Information about assessment was gleaned from a variety of sources by stakeholders. SQA's communication strategy is clearly important to these matters, as most learners and parents and a sizeable proportion of teachers indicated that the school or college was an important source of information. SQA itself was also cited, especially by teachers. News media was a source for many respondents. Therefore, clear information dissemination through formal channels to schools and the media is crucial to the functioning of the system.
- ◆ Widespread support was found for the use of teacher assessment during the pandemic. However, there were concerns about potential bias arising from teacher-pupil relationships and parental pressure. Good moderation systems were flagged as important.
- ◆ Overall, teachers were considered to have been well prepared for the assessments in 2021.
- ◆ A large majority (four out of five respondents) were in favour of reform of the assessment system. However, this was not a straightforward call for more or less examinations or a desire for teacher assessment. Instead, there was a groundswell of support for a learner-focused system that provided optionality and flexibility to better adapt to individuals' strengths and circumstances, as well as to guard against any detrimental effects of assessment upon learners' mental health.

## 1.5 Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of SQA colleagues to this report, especially Simon Allan, Ellen Macintosh, Martyn Ware and Laura Wilson. Additionally, we owe a debt of thanks to all of the stakeholders who participated in this research.

## **2 Understanding stakeholder views of qualifications in Scotland**

The research reported here is part of a programme of work by SQA to engage with stakeholders' perceptions of qualifications in Scotland. Prompted by the systems crisis in the summer of 2020, the impetus for this research programme came from the SQA Executive, charging the research team and the organisation to investigate what qualification users considered the principal issues to be and to use the information to better develop assessment policy. Dips in public confidence occur following systemic crises and it takes several years to regain trust and confidence. In the Rapid Review of the National Qualification Experience conducted in 2020, attention was drawn to a perceived lack of transparency in engagement with stakeholders (Priestley et al., 2020, p4).

This report is one of four which looks at stakeholder perceptions of standards; in this case focusing upon a questionnaire of stakeholder views. The other three in this series are:

1. Overview of the Perceptions of Assessment Standards in Scotland Project
2. Perceptions of Assessment Standards in Scotland: Focus Groups with Stakeholders
4. Perceptions of Assessment Standards in Scotland: Survey of Employers

### **2.1 Stakeholders' perceptions of assessment standards in Scotland**

Public confidence in the qualification system is essential to maintain the currency of the certificates for the young people whose life chances depend upon them. It is vital that relevant stakeholder groups are both well-informed and consulted. Surprisingly, how people view standards and what influences their confidence in assessment systems are little-researched topics. We know from research conducted in England that stakeholders' views of reliability and trust in the system go well beyond the standard setting system, to include issues regarding content standards, bias, reliability, validity, and utility of qualifications (He, Boyle and Opposs, 2011; Chamberlain, 2013; Simpson and Baird, 2013). Necessarily, assessment industry insiders have come to define terms in specific ways, but this can make communication between assessment specialists and the wider community less effective.

The purpose of this research was to investigate what standards mean to practitioners, pupils, parents and to society more broadly. Influences upon stakeholders' confidence in qualifications and their views about assessment reform were also matters of interest. Additionally, the disruptive context of the pandemic raised significant issues upon which stakeholders' views were usefully sought. Concerns regarding assessment standards during the pandemic were an important part of the evidence-gathering. The emerging findings informed SQA's Communications Strategy and through disseminating the findings, contributed to the delivery of that strategy.

## **2.2 Approach**

Research, which was at once independent, well-informed, and integrated with the operational needs of SQA was needed. Additionally, the project needed to gather information that could influence longer term assessment policy as well as the shorter-term needs for forthcoming assessment series. A participatory research design was adopted, involving collaboration between researchers in the Departments of Education at the Universities of Glasgow and Oxford and colleagues in SQA's research and communications teams. Stakeholders were consulted about the design of the project and the data collection techniques as part of the participatory design. To ensure that the project was open to the views of participants, focus groups with 82 practitioners, lecturers, pupils, students, parents, carers, head practitioners, college principals, employers, university admissions officers and journalists were conducted first. Next, an online questionnaire survey was conducted with 918 complete responses. Finally, a telephone survey of 103 employers was conducted.

As the focus groups were conducted in advance of the 2021 summer assessment series, rapid analyses of the findings by stakeholder group were produced for use by relevant SQA colleagues. Questions were raised by teams across SQA that were addressed in the data collection where possible. Interpretation of the findings benefited from wide discussion across the project team and with colleagues across SQA, but importantly, the voices of stakeholders were deemed central to the purpose of the work throughout.



### 3 Methodology

A participatory action research project was undertaken, involving participatory methods, dialogue across departments in SQA and rapidly produced interim findings. The rationale for this approach, which produced challenging timescales, was to ensure that the research was useful to SQA and therefore benefited the public. Expertise within the organisation was integrated into the design of the study and the independence of the teams in universities brought wide perspectives to the research design. Data collection techniques involved focus groups with a wide range of stakeholders, a survey of stakeholder views and a separate survey of employers' views. Further information about the participatory methods and the other strands of data collection can be found in the other three reports in this series.

The topic of examination standards is not new in academia. However, recently most of the literature has been focused on media statements and policy documents and reports. There has been limited empirical research exploring stakeholder perceptions of standards and qualifications directly, particularly in Scotland. This is of note, as wide variation exists in perspectives and understanding between assessment bodies like SQA and key stakeholders who engage with the assessment process in a range of different ways.

This study focused on understanding how key stakeholders involved with the assessment and qualifications process understand the notion of standards, and how they assess the fairness in a qualifications process. This research was conducted with stakeholders who engage with the qualification and assessment process at different timepoints and in different ways. Working with these stakeholders allowed us to build a holistic view of how qualifications are understood by the community.

This study used multiple methods to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What influenced the reactions of different communities to the SQA qualifications processes and results in 2020?
- 2) What factors influence different communities' perceptions of fairness for all learners in qualifications?
- 3) How do people in different communities understand the term standards in the context of qualifications? What do they believe matters?
- 4) What do people in different communities believe can be learned from experience in 2020 and 2021 in relation to:
  - a. confidence that future qualifications are fair and that standards are dependable?
  - b. actions of individuals and communities to inform public perceptions?

### **3.1 Data collection**

In this, final element of data collection, data was collected through an online questionnaire, attached in Appendix A. The project prioritised a participatory approach and so two rounds of piloting were undertaken so that the questionnaire could be adapted to both reflect findings of focus group discussions – the first element of data collection — as well as adapting to the changing educational environment and needs of the SQA. This survey had three main purposes:

- 1) To report on the past two years and to provide opportunities to reflect and learn
- 2) To inform long-term thinking about the future of assessments and qualifications
- 3) To highlight differences between SQA’s intentions and what actually happened with qualifications in 2020 and 2021.

Additionally, the survey aimed to offer respondents an opportunity to have their voices heard as they reflect on a challenging and turbulent two years.

#### ***3.1.1 Questionnaire design***

While this questionnaire was initially designed to answer these questions, it was adapted slightly following piloting and analysis of the focus groups. Results below are presented as five themes:

- 1) Standards
- 2) Trust and communication
- 3) Teacher assessment
- 4) The future of assessment in Scotland
- 5) Lessons learned from the pandemic

These themes were chosen following both analysis of focus group discussions and initial analysis of survey responses.

#### ***3.1.2 Piloting of the questionnaire***

In addition to the operation of the research team, the participatory approach involved piloting the survey with all the key stakeholder categories. This enabled participants to provide feedback and suggest further adaptations to the survey before full deployment. The instrument was first piloted in June 2021 by sending it to 100 learners who were studying for National Qualifications, 100 parents or carers with a child in S5 or S6 and likely to be doing a National Qualification in 2021 and 100 educational professionals in schools and colleges. The 87 respondents included 39 education professionals, 29 parents or carers and 19 learners. The survey was administered through SQA’s pulse survey panel. Samples were drawn from members of the panel who had not previously been surveyed or who had not responded to a survey for some time, so as not to overburden panel members at a time when the organisation had been seeking feedback on a range of issues. The results of this pilot were reviewed by the Oxford research team who made several minor changes to the survey to improve its clarity. The survey then was further piloted in October 2021 following recommendations from the focus group discussions and to include perceptions of the 2021 qualifications experience. The methodology for this pilot was the same,

using SQA's pulse survey panel to send the survey to 200 participants, 100 teachers and 100 learners, using their pulse tool. We had 135 responses, 77 teachers, 28 learners and 30 parents or carers. Following this survey, there was no need to make substantial changes to question content, a couple of questions were adjusted for ease of completion.

### ***3.1.3 Administration of the final questionnaire***

The amended questionnaire was sent out on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November 2021 and remained live until the first week of the school holidays. A link to the questionnaire was sent to half of all secondary schools in Scotland, while SQA's 2021 ACM (Alternative Certification Model) survey was sent to the other half, and all further education colleges. Distribution within these institutions was administered through SQA Coordinators, a formal role within each of these schools.

### ***3.1.4 Analytical strategy for the questionnaire***

The questionnaire was developed, distributed using Qualtrics, and first analysis to produce a descriptive report (in-house) was completed using the Qualtrics in-built analysis software. Following this, data was downloaded and analysed using SPSS, both by respondent type (learner, teacher or lecturer, and parent or carer) as well as by type of educational institution (state school, independent school, and further education (FE) college). The final questionnaire had 918 respondents who fully completed the form. The sample was relatively evenly split between learners (pupils and students) (38%), teachers or lecturers (33%), and parents or carers (28%). In the results section we present findings as aggregated for the whole survey where there were no significant differences between each group. Where there were noteworthy differences in response trends for separate groups these are presented in the main body of text and discussed. Full breakdown of each question by respondent categories can be found in Appendix B and table or figures with a caption beginning with a B can be found there. Findings in graphs are usually presented as percentages rather than counts for ease of comparison and presentation, as each group had different numbers of respondents.

Finally, since an important motivation of the study as a whole was to offer participants the opportunity to have their voices heard, the survey had several free-text options. Rather than sticking to the specifics of the question, respondents used these to write broadly about their experiences and perceptions. As such, these provided rich and interesting data, which was analysed qualitatively, and quotes are included where appropriate throughout this report.

## **3.2 Ethics**

This study was conducted in accordance with the guidelines from the British Educational Research Association. Research ethics approvals were obtained for the study ahead of commencing data collection through the University of Oxford (ED-CIA-21-157) and University of Glasgow ethical approval procedures.

## 4 Stakeholder questionnaire findings

### 4.1 Respondents

This section describes the respondents to the questionnaire. Over 2,000 people responded to the questionnaire, but only 918 completed the whole survey and so we have limited analysis to these 918 respondents. The reason for excluding those who had partially completed the report is feedback from some respondents that they had found the questionnaire difficult to complete on a mobile device and so had used a laptop instead. As responses were anonymised it is not possible to match partially completed questionnaires with fully completed ones from the same respondent on a different device, and so we have excluded all partially completed questionnaires from the analysis.

*The sample was relatively evenly split between learners (pupils and students) (n=346, 38%), teachers or lecturers (n=306, 33%), and parents or carers (n=258, 28%). The majority of respondents were associated with state secondary schools (n=492, 59%) with a third from independent schools (n=274, 33%) and a smaller number from FE colleges (n=56, 7%). The representation from independent schools was higher than national average, primarily due to proportionally higher numbers of independent school learners responding than state-school learners (Figure 4.1.1). The majority of learners were 16 or 17, with a small number of older students from FE colleges. Amongst parents, carers, teachers, and lecturers there was a broad range of ages (histograms shown in Appendix B). Overall, more respondents were female (n=5377, 64%) than male (n=262, 34%) and a small minority who did not identify as male or female or preferred not to say (n= 19, 1%) (Figure 4.1.2). The gender split was particularly pronounced in parents and carers of whom 85% were female (*

Figure B.2 ). Respondents held a variety of qualifications (Figure 4.1.3) and came from a range of different local authorities across Scotland (Figure 4.1.4). The majority of respondents (76%) described their ethnicity as ‘Scottish’ with ‘Other British’ (12%) and ‘Irish’ (2%) being the other two significant categories (Figure B.6 1).

Figure 4.1.1 — Respondent categories

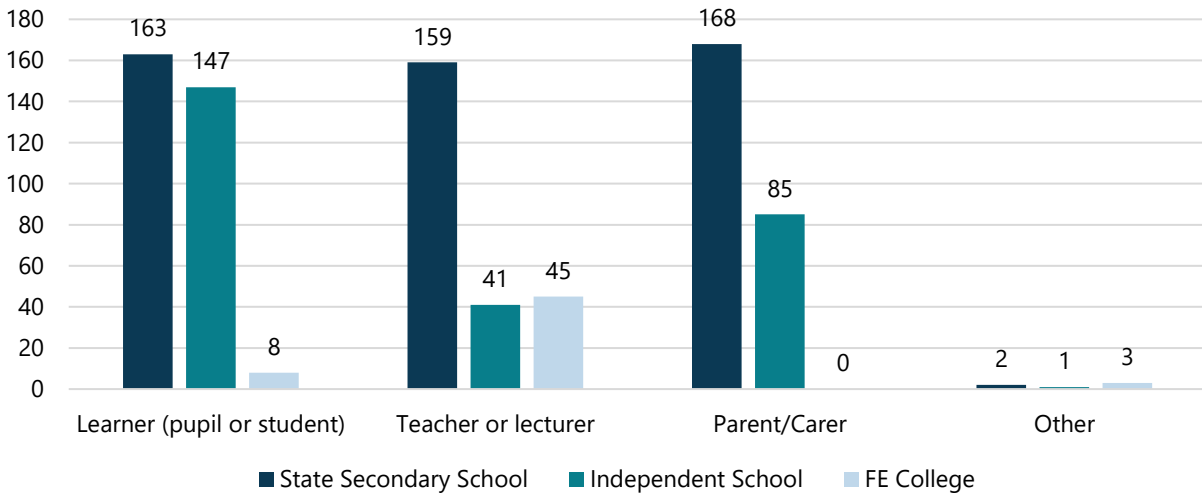


Figure 4.1.2 — How would you describe your gender?

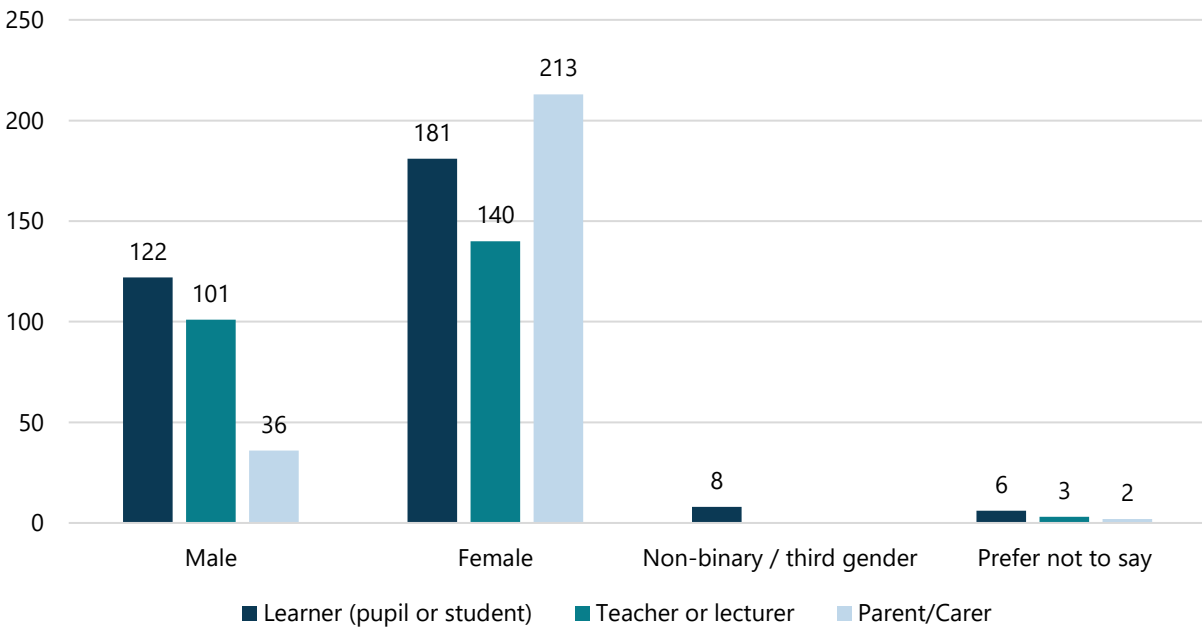


Figure 4.1.3 — What is the highest qualification you hold?

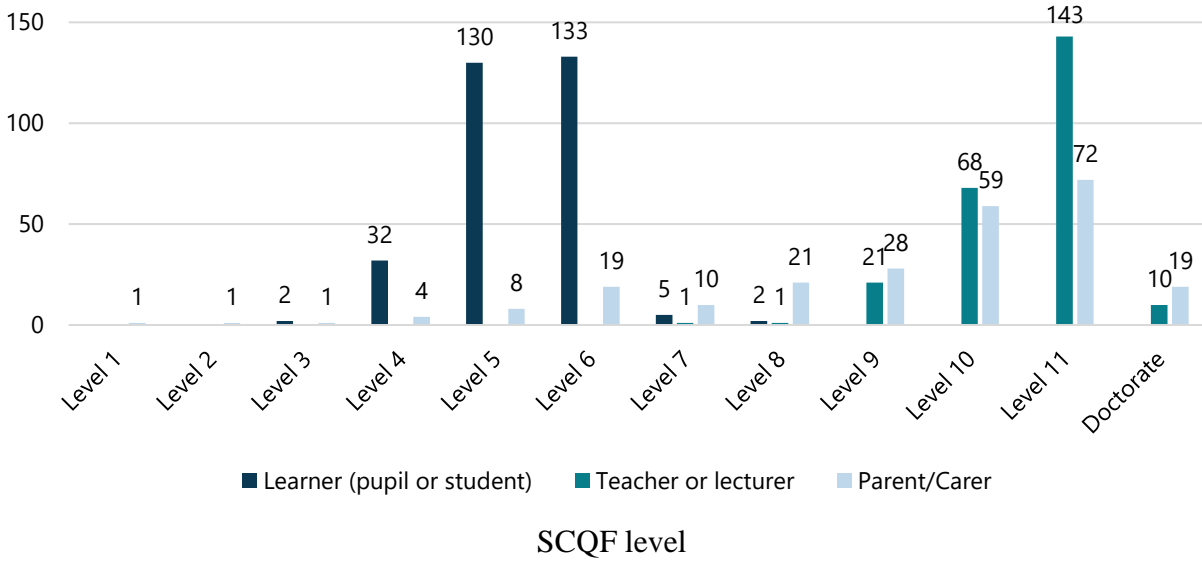
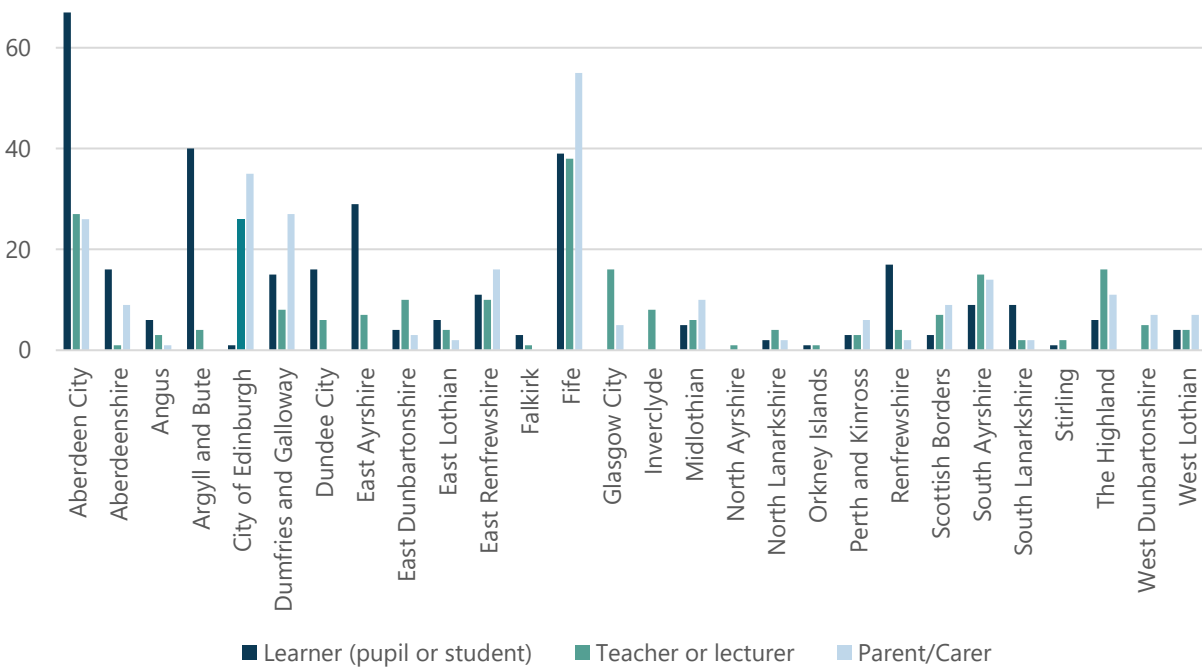


Figure 4.1.4 — What is your local authority?



## 4.2 Standards

*Due to the unforeseen circumstances, different schools were able to teach different levels of learning solely due to student/teacher absence or other*

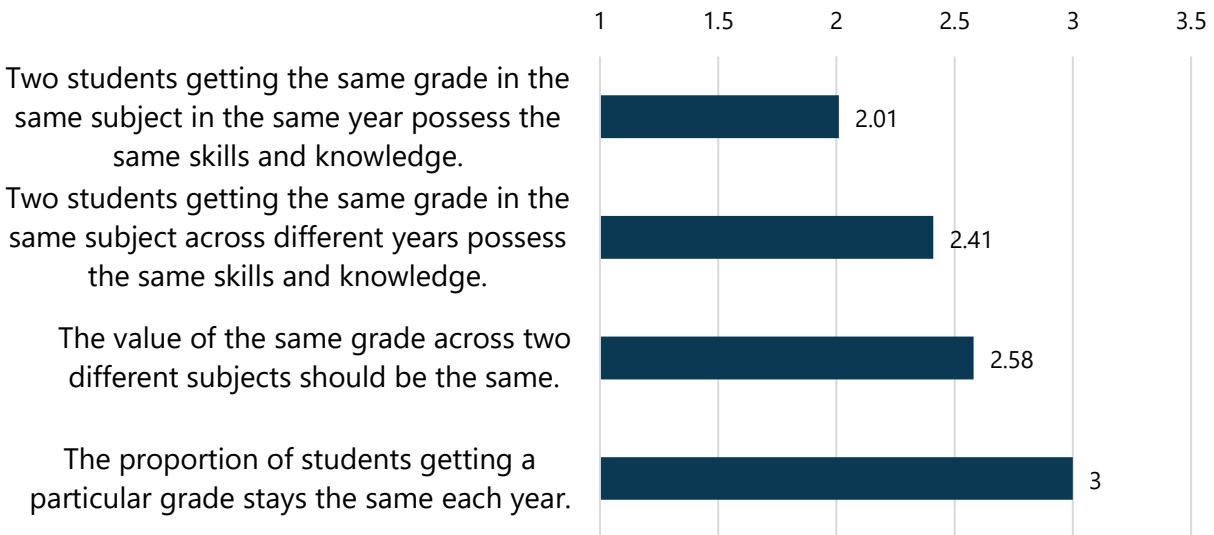
*implications due to COVID. Therefore, it would have been unfair to put every student in the same evaluation as it was not a level playing field.*

(Learner)

This section presents respondents views on the meaning and importance of standards in National Qualifications. Respondents were asked to rank four statements in order of importance when considering standards (Figure 4.2.1). Consistency for learners with the same knowledge and skills achieving the same grade in the same subject in the same year was generally ranked as most important, followed by consistency between different years for learners with the same knowledge and skills. Equivalent value of the same grade across different subjects was, on average, ranked next with the proportion of students achieving a particular grade remaining consistent over time ranked as least important. However, opinion was divided on this topic, with learners in independent schools and FE colleges more likely to rank the proportion of students getting grades staying the same each year as the most important statement (Figure 4.2.2 — 4.2.4). School pupils were split on this, with approximately the same proportions ranking this statement as most important and least important. Thus, statistical outcomes were important to some learners and far less so for practitioner and carers.

*Figure 4.2.1 — Mean ranks of statements to consider when thinking about standards*

Key: 1 = most important



*Figure 4.2.2 — Ranking of “The proportion of students getting a particular grade stays the same each year” (Teachers or Lecturers)*

Key: 1 = most important

### Teacher or lecturer

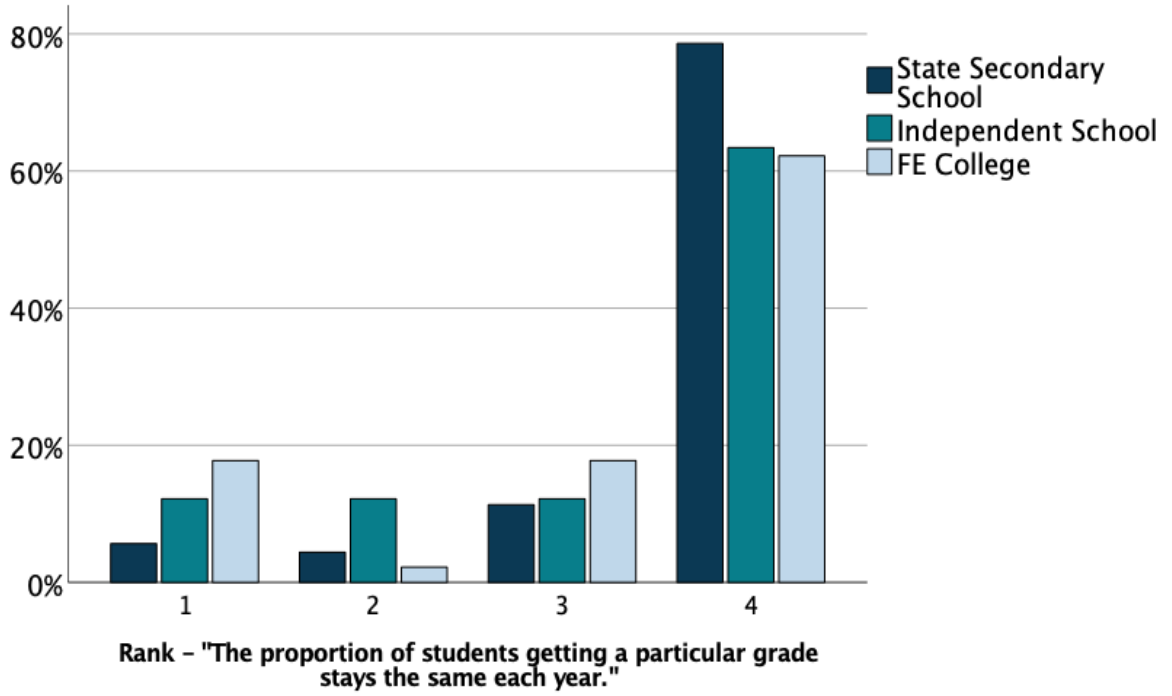




Figure 4.2.3 — Ranking of “The proportion of students getting a particular grade stays the same each year” — (Parents or Carers)

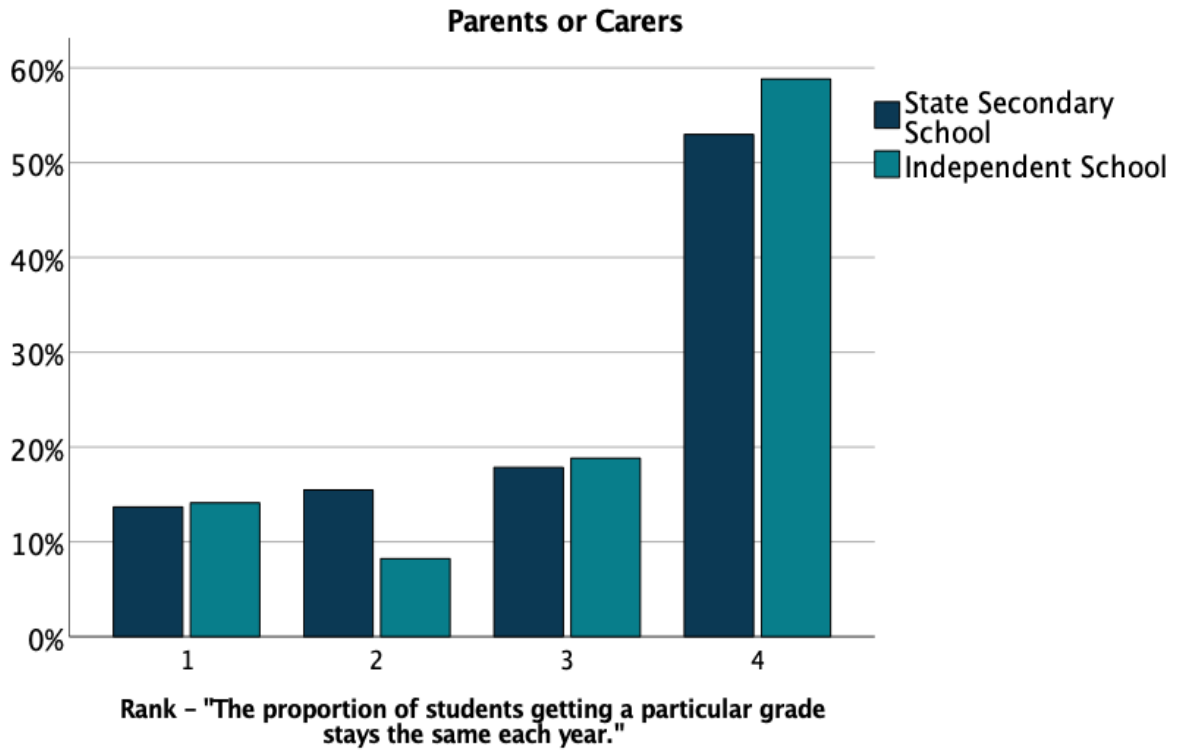
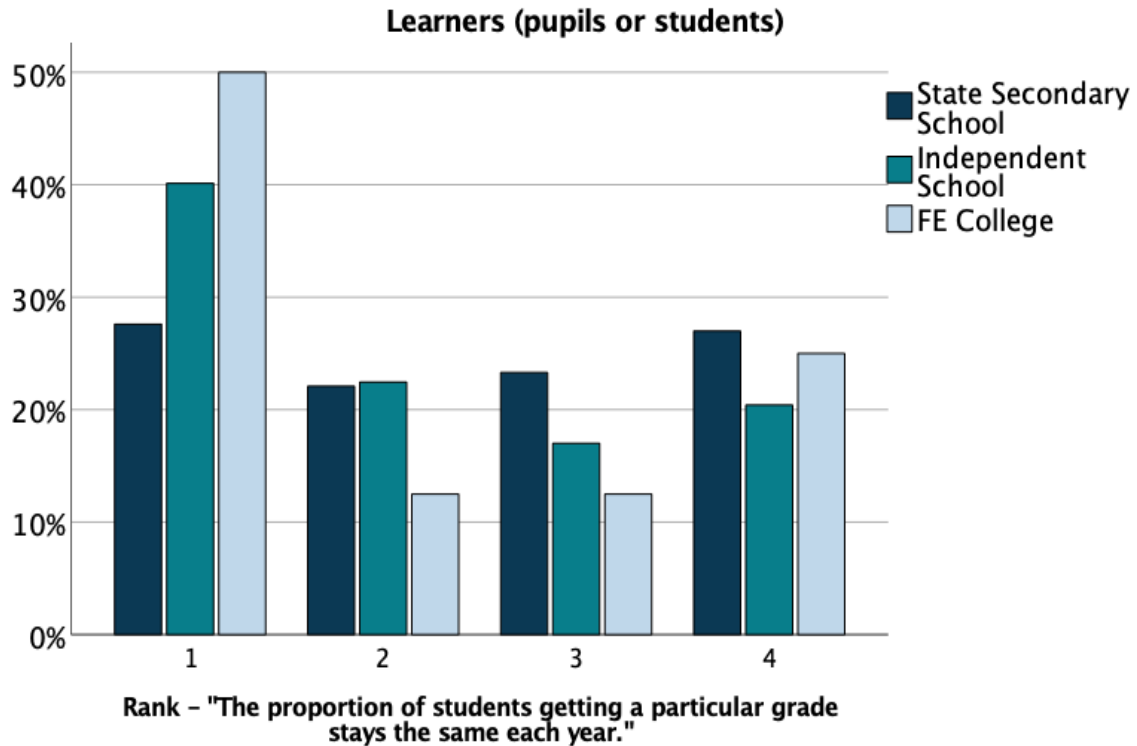


Figure 4.2.4 — Ranking of “The proportion of students getting a particular grade stays the same each year” — (Learners)



Across all groups there was a view that standards were not the same as previous years and between different schools. Almost three quarters (71%) of respondents responded that they did not think standards in 2020 and 2021 were the same as in previous years. (Table B. 3). However, when asked whether National Qualification (NQ) standards were easier in 2021, over a quarter of respondents did not draw a conclusion (Figure 4.2.5), which implies that at least some respondents considered that ‘different’ standards may not have meant ‘easier’. Only 11% of respondents considered that standards were consistent across schools (Figure 4.2.).

Those associated with FE colleges and with independent schools were most likely to agree with the statement that NQs were easier in 2021 – 46% of respondents from FE colleges and 45% of respondents from independent schools (Figure 4.2.5). Respondents associated with state secondary schools were mixed in their responses with 40% disagreeing and 33% agreeing that NQs were easier in 2021. The effects of learning loss over the pandemic are likely to have affected respondents’ views on the ease or difficulty of the assessments. Corroborating evidence is that despite the tendency to report feeling that NQs were easier in 2021 than usual, only a third considered NQs grades were too generous (Figure 4.2.). Views of lost learning are discussed further below in relation to direct questions on that topic.

Figure 4.2.5 — National Qualifications were easier in 2021 than they normally are

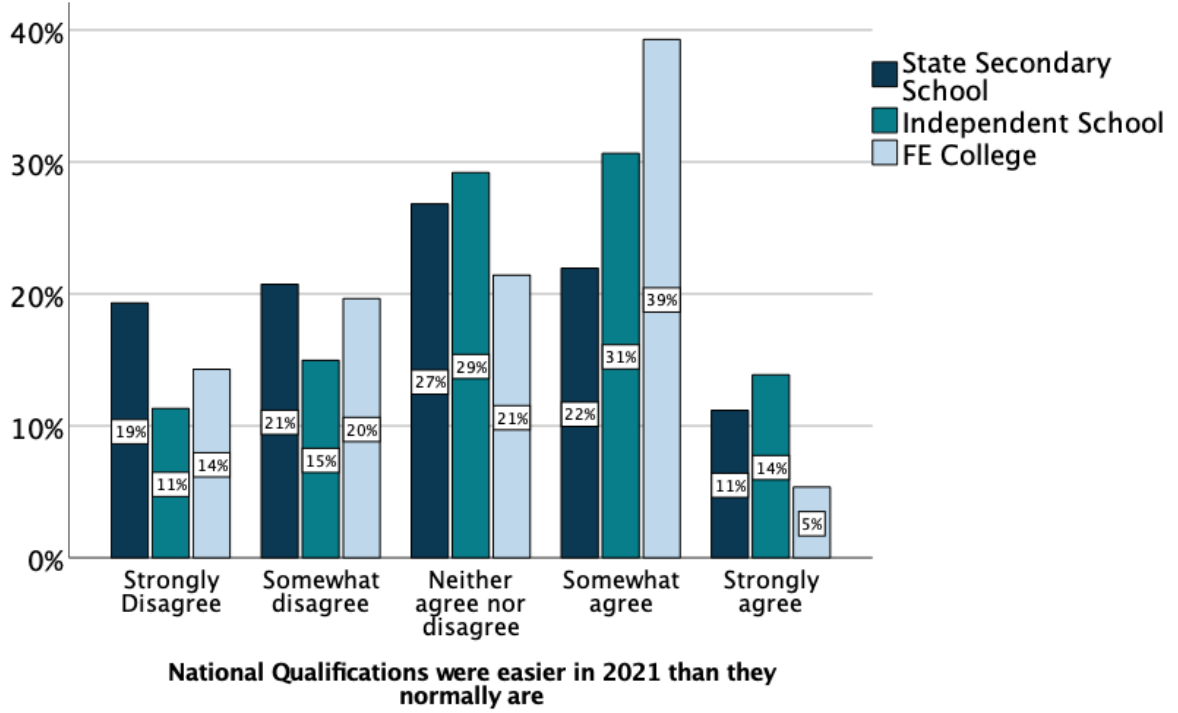


Figure 4.2.6 — Standards in National Qualifications were the same across all schools in 2021

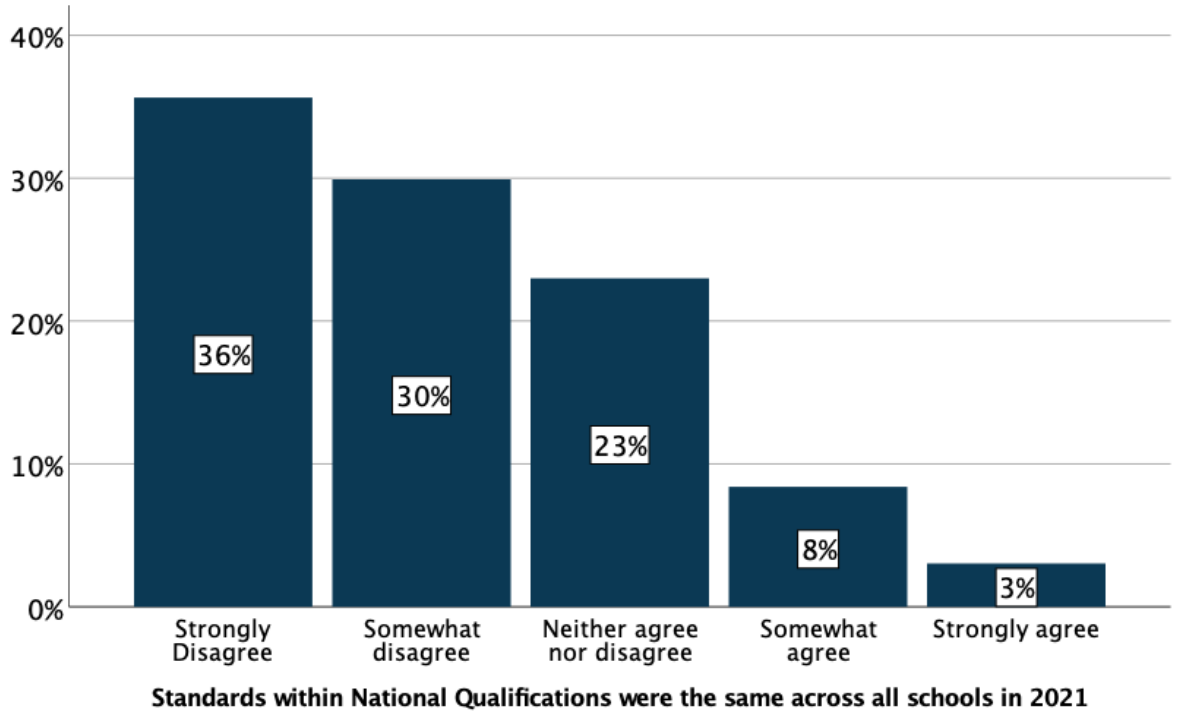
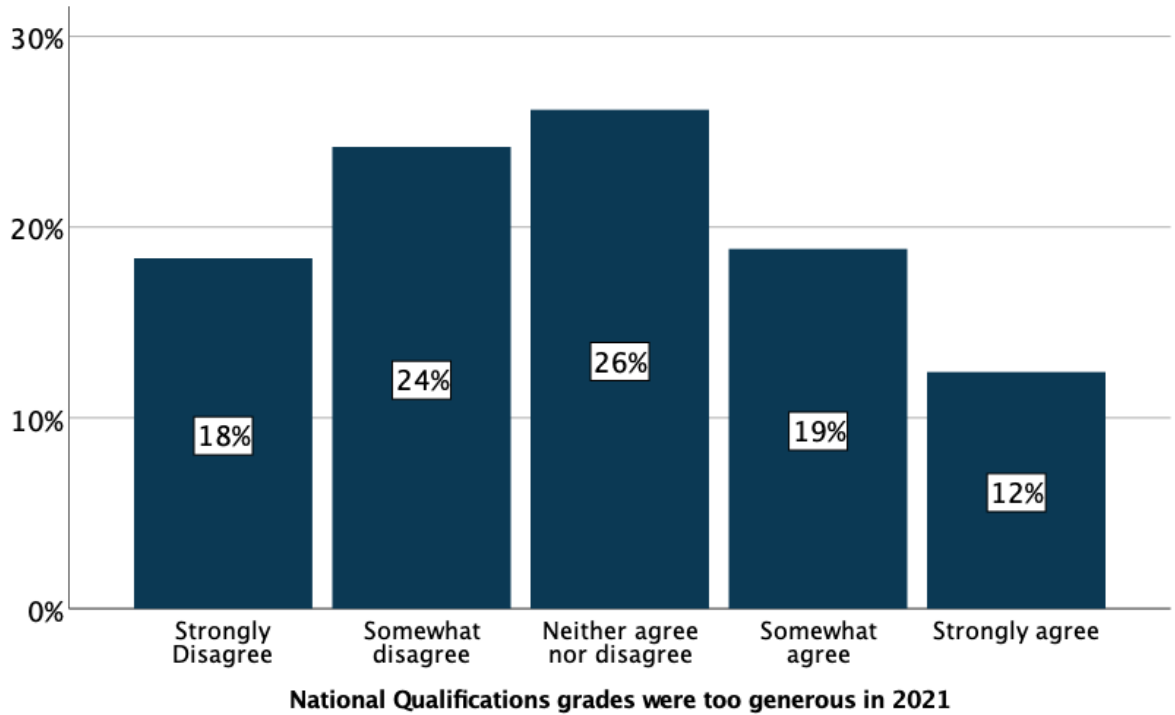


Figure 4.2.7 — National Qualification grades were too generous in 2021



*Learners, many of whom would have received a grade in 2021, were least likely to think that the grades were too generous (Figure 4.2.). Amongst parents and carers, the most common response was not to give a definitive opinion on whether the grades were too generous (*

Figure 4.2.). However, of those parents and carers who expressed a view, those associated with independent schools were more likely to agree that NQ grades were too generous (43%), compared with those associated with state schools (20%).

Figure 4.2.8 — National Qualification grades were too generous – by respondent type

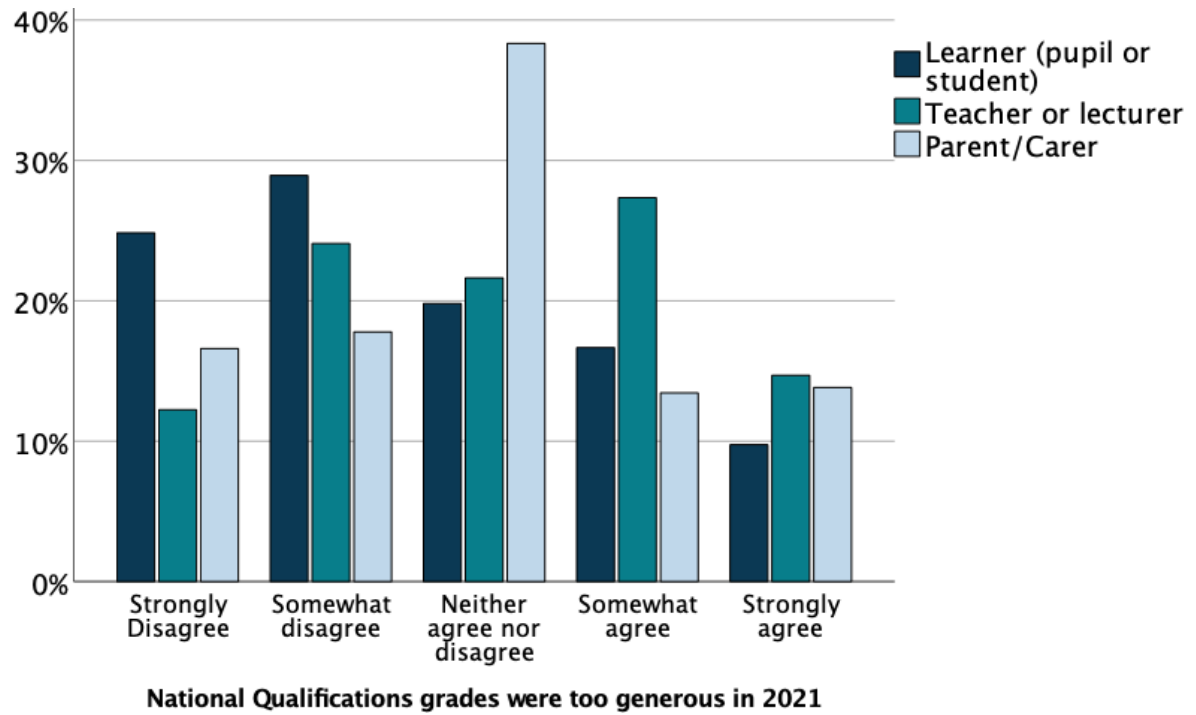
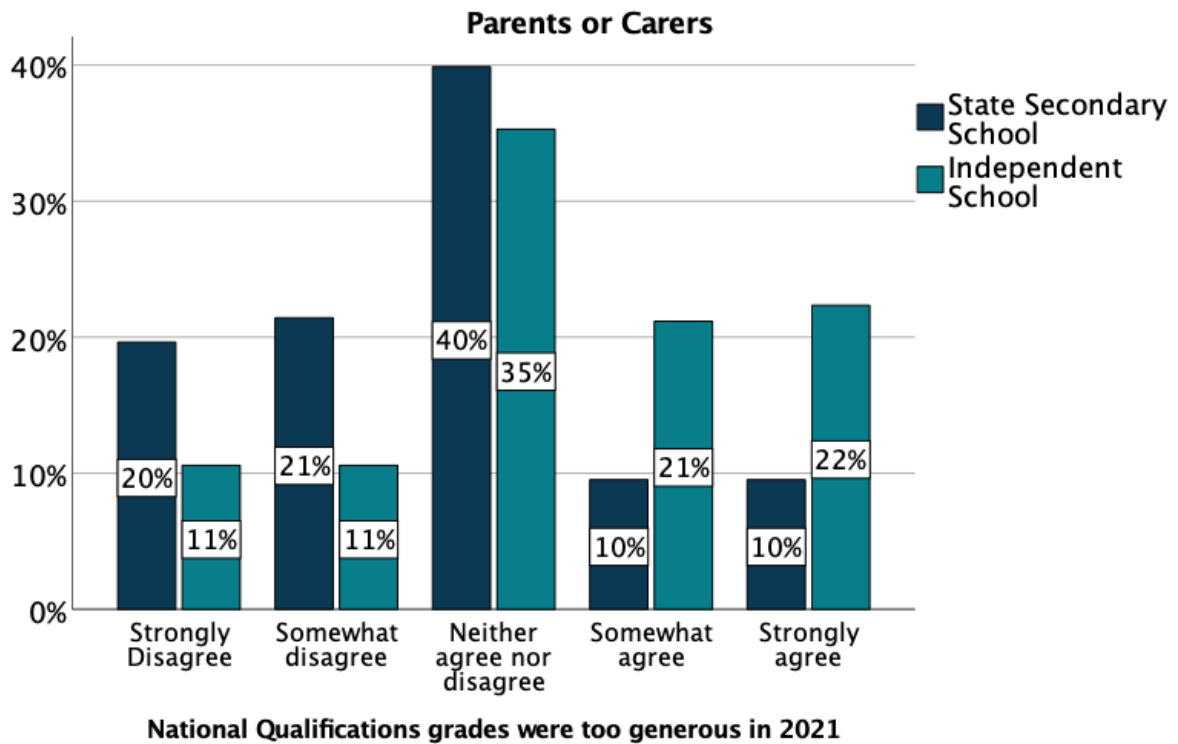


Figure 4.2.9 — National Qualification grades were too generous- state and independent school parents or carers



Respondents recognised that the pandemic had caused significant disruption to learning and a large majority (73%) agreed that ‘lost learning time’ meant it was not possible for learners to perform to the same standards as in previous years (Figure 4.2.). Consequently, respondents tended to agree (60% agreed or strongly agreed) that learners who had qualified in 2021 would struggle compared to learners from other cohorts due to missed learning compared to learners with the same grades awarded in previous years (Figure 4.2.).

*Figure 4.2.10 — Lost learning time in 2021 made it impossible for learners to perform at the standards normally required for the grades*

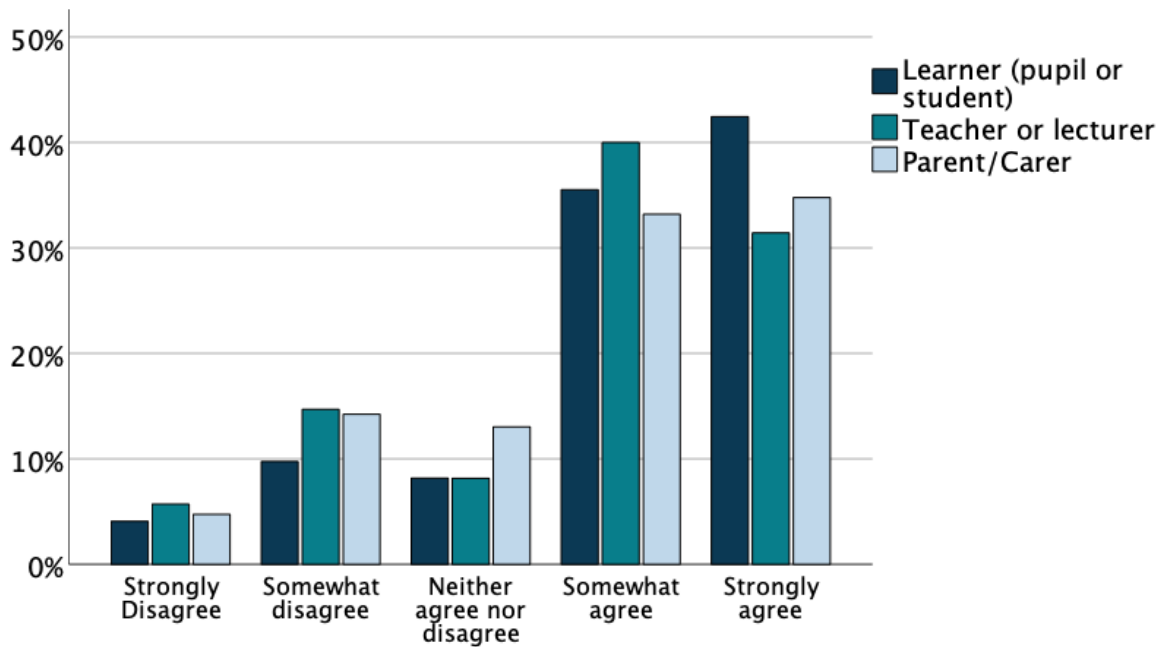
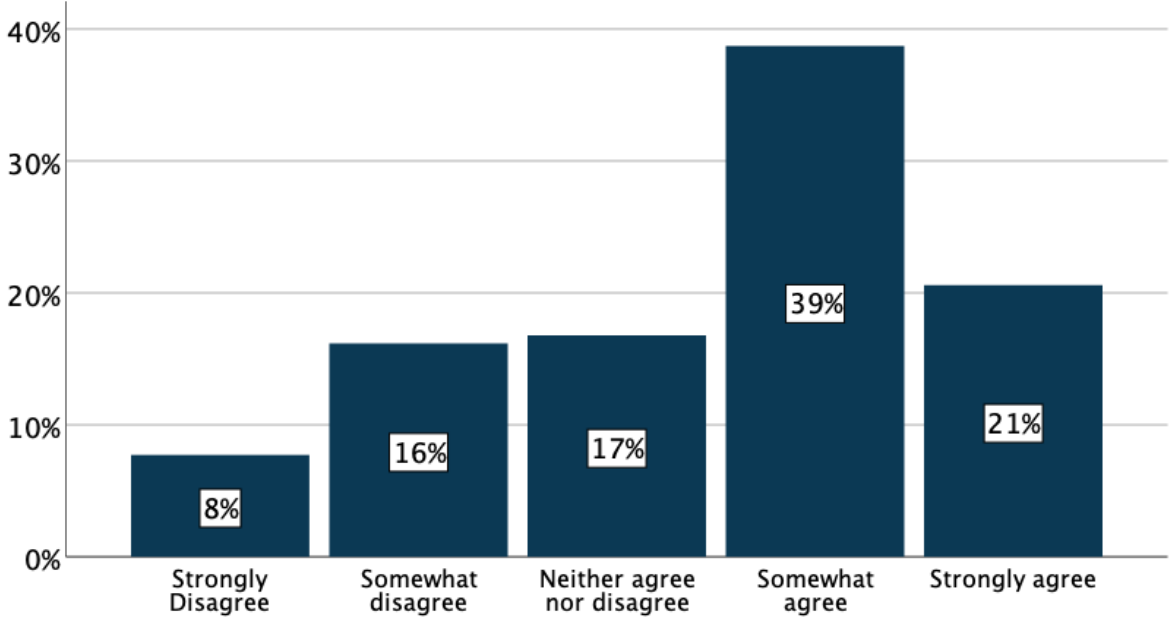


Figure 4.2.11 — Learners with 2021 National Qualifications will struggle when they go on to further study or employment because they missed learning compared to learners with the same grades in previous years



Overall, more respondents reported feeling that the results awarded in 2021 were fair than felt it was unfair – 46% ‘fair’ compared with 36% ‘unfair’ (Figure 4.2.3). However, in keeping with results reported above, respondents associated with independent schools were more likely to report feeling the grades were unfair – 38% ‘fair compared with 43% ‘unfair’ (Figure 4.2.4).

Figure 4.2.3 — Do you think that the results awarded in 2021 were fair?

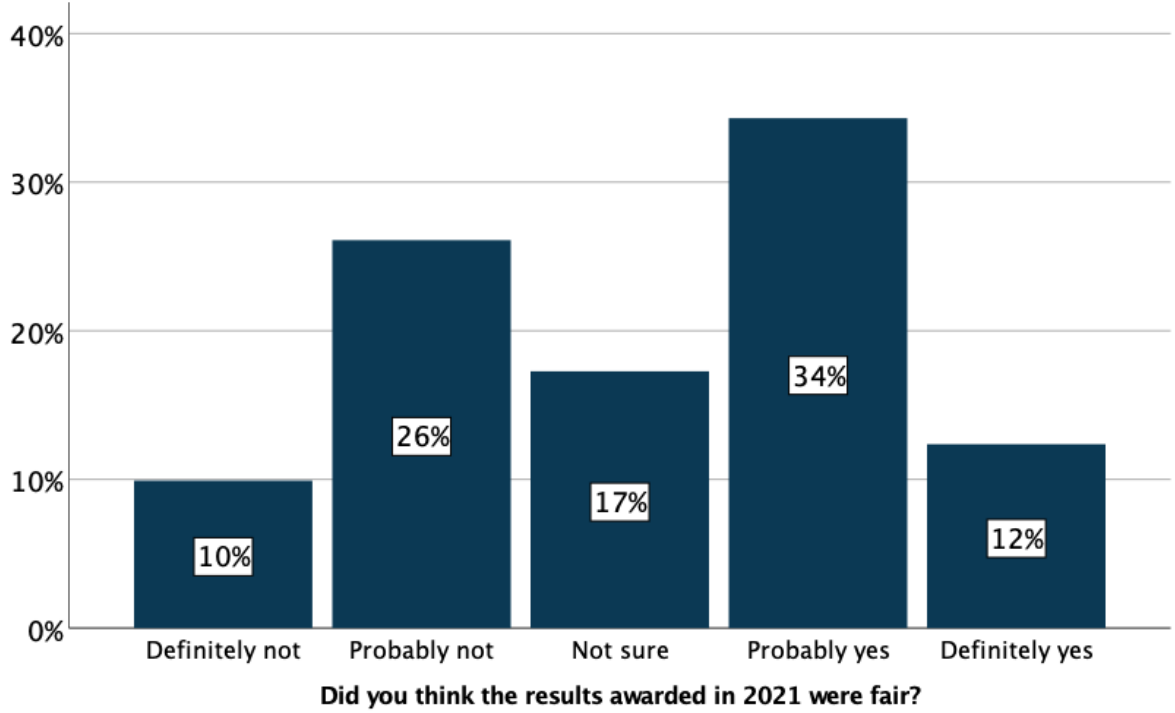
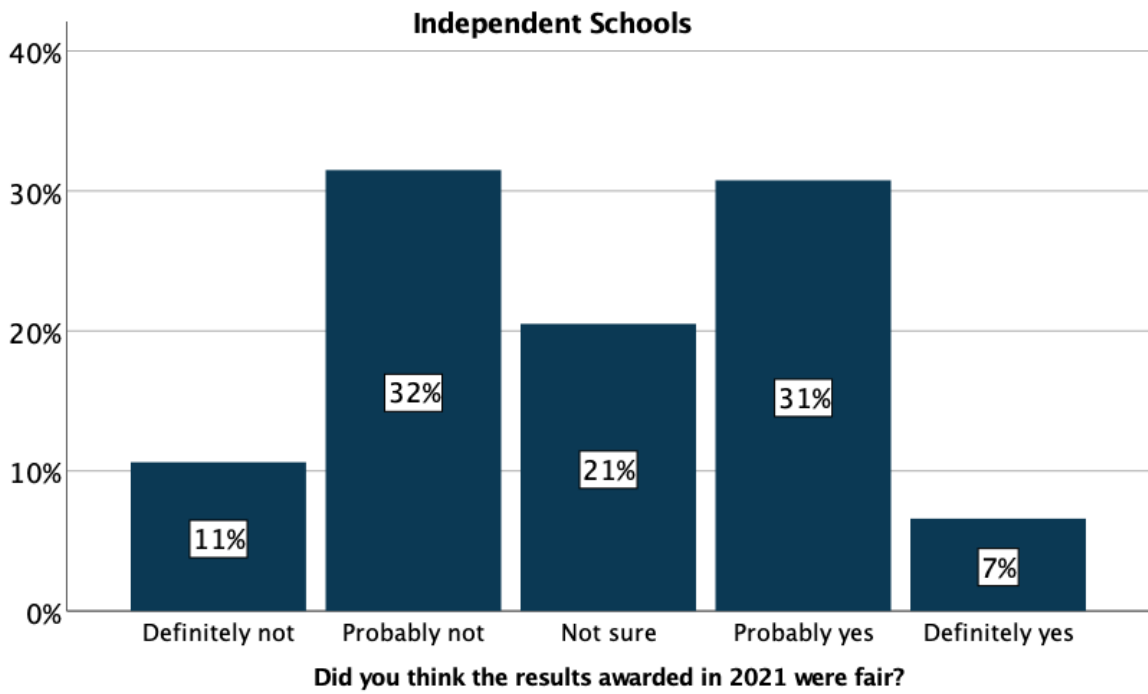


Figure 4.2.4 — Did you think that the results awarded in 2021 were fair? (Independent schools)





The majority of respondents (57%) felt that less time was spent preparing learners for assessments in comparison with other years (Figure 4.2.5). However, analysis by respondent type shows a significant minority (25%) of teachers strongly disagreed with this statement (

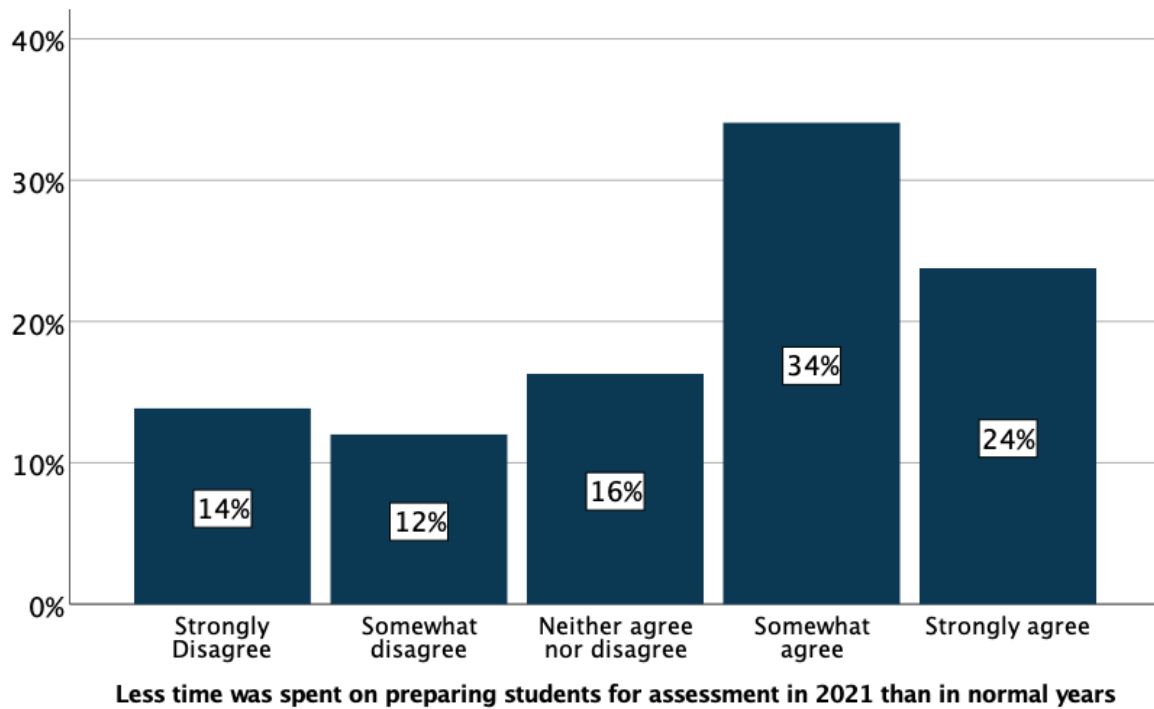


Figure 4.2.6), which could reflect the different effects of the pandemic upon learners and teachers.

Figure 4.2.5 — Less time was spent on preparing students for assessment in 2021 than in previous years

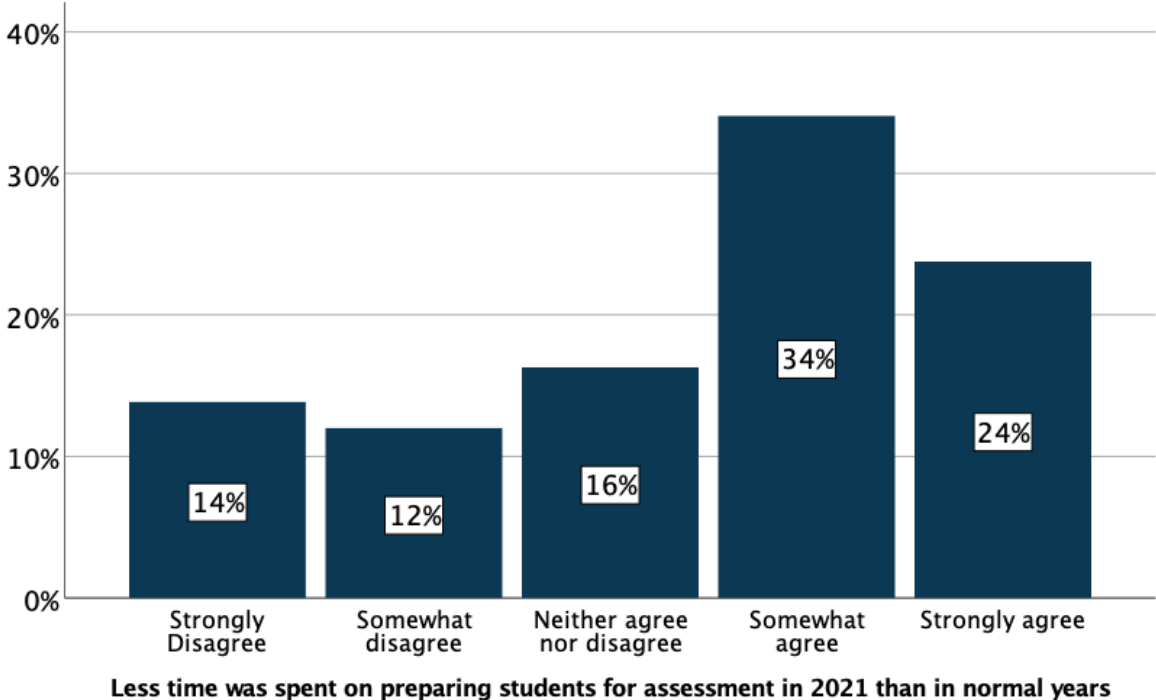
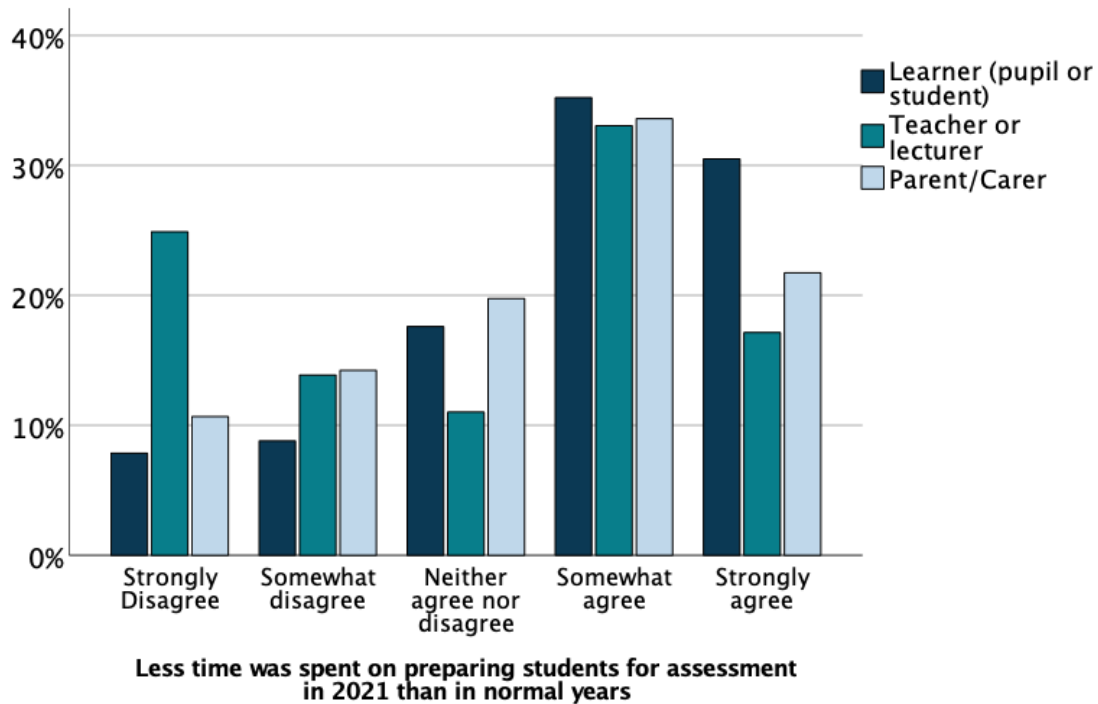


Figure 4.2.6 — Less time was spent on preparing students for assessment in 2021 than in previous years



Assessment policy often involves difficult choices because policy options cannot simultaneously deliver all the desirable characteristics of a system. Stakeholders’ values and beliefs in terms of prioritisation of these characteristics is therefore a useful knowledge base. To find out about these, some forced choice questions were presented in the questionnaire which required participants to choose a preferred statement. This proved to be a highly informative technique. Participants largely prioritised consistency of standards across schools within a subject over comparability within schools (Table 4.2.1). This speaks to the desire for comparability of grades at a national level. The concern reported above that there had not been comparability between schools in 2021 is therefore highly problematical for stakeholders.

Again, in keeping with findings reported earlier, stakeholders generally agreed that grades should represent students’ knowledge and skills, rather than the statistical outcomes remaining the same (Table 4.2.1). A subtle nuance was investigated in the statement pairs which asked people to choose whether grades represent people’s underlying abilities or simply how they performed on the day. For this choice, the findings were not as clear cut as for the earlier statement pairs. The majority of respondents in each stakeholder group opted for grades indicating how the learner had performed on the day, but the majority was slim for teachers and lecturers and for parents and carers. Two thirds of learners were of the view that grades simply reflect performance on the day. In an item relating to how standards are set at a national level, participants were asked whether the outcomes simply reflected learners’ performances or if they took into account national statistics. Here, the responses were split almost 50/50.

These findings indicate that there is not a clearcut consensus on what standards mean and how they should be set; there are contradictory views. There is overwhelming support for the notion that standards represent learners' performances and there is a groundswell of opinion amongst stakeholders that standards should be the same across schools. While half of respondents believed that NQ standards currently take into account statistics, half did not believe this.

Table 4.2.1 — Responses to forced choice statements regarding assessment beliefs

Key: emboldened text and green highlighting indicates the response with which most respondents agreed.

Statements	Whole survey		Learners		Teachers and lectures		Parents and carers	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
<p>1. The most important element for assessment standards is consistency of teachers' judgements between schools</p> <p>OR</p> <p>2. The most important element for assessment standards is consistency of teachers' judgements within schools</p>	75%	25%	63%	37%	84%	16%	82%	18%
<p>1. It is important that the number of students that receive each grade remains about the same every year</p> <p>OR</p> <p>2. It is important that grades are based on individual student skills and knowledge</p>	21%	79%	15%	85%	5%	95%	23%	77%
<p>1. Qualification standards tell you about people's underlying abilities, not just how they performed on the day</p> <p>OR</p> <p>2. Qualification standards tell you about performances on the assessment</p>	41%	59%	33%	67%	44%	56%	49%	51%

Statements	Whole survey		Learners		Teachers and lectures		Parents and carers	
	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2
1. Qualification standards take into account both students' performances and the national statistics OR 2. Qualification standards only take into account students' performances	51%	49%	51%	49%	53%	46%	48%	52%

Respondents were asked to write free text regarding whether standards had been maintained over 2020 and 2021 compared to previous years. Responses were broadly similar across different groups with respondents who chose to write free text responses tending to be slightly more negative than the survey sample as a whole. It was articulated by most that the standards had not been maintained compared with previous years.

*The data on significantly higher proportions of students getting higher grades is conclusive evidence that standards were not the same as prior to COVID.*

(Parent/Carer)

One of the reasons that they highlighted for not being able to compare standards was that the process of assessment had not only changed from previous years but had been changed and re-articulated so much between 2020 and 2021.

*You cannot compare apples and eggs: the qualifications were neither 'easier' nor 'harder'; they were different. As they had to be owing to factors such as lost teaching time, slimmed down courses, anxiety, and attendance.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

They also highlighted that the time that students had spent in and out of various lockdowns had resulted in an unequal distribution of resources at schools which meant that some students would have been destined to perform better in examinations just by the nature of the access that they had to materials or teachers via online means.

*Not all children had access to online learning. It was not an equal playing field and teachers did not take this into consideration.*

(Parent/Carer)

Respondents also reported feeling that while their school had put measures in place to maintain standards, they regularly pointed to *other* schools as have cheated or ‘gamed the system’.

*The assessment process in my son’s school was robust but I am not convinced it was in other schools and that is why the results across the country were distorted. The high percentage of A grades awarded was not because students were suddenly more intelligent, it is because the process was flawed.*

(Parent/Carer)

It is interesting to note that for those who believed that the standards had remained the same there was a distinction between standards maintained at the system versus at the individual level — respondents who felt that standards had been maintained referred to their confidence in the capacity of teachers to make accurate judgements, focusing an individual level, discussing the maintenance of standards for themselves or for their school.

*Modifications to assessment meant that in volume and content standards were not the same but the equitable application of assessment standards in my own school meant that assessment of modified content was fair and robust and performance standards were applied.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

### **4.3 Trust and communication**

As is perhaps to be expected, learners, parents and carers received information about NQs most frequently from schools or their teachers (Figure 4.3.1). News outlets also represented a significant source of information for parents and carers. Teachers and lecturers tended to get their information most commonly directly from SQA, but also from schools. Sources of information did not seem to significantly change between 2020 and 2021 (Figure 4.3.2).

Figure 4.3.1 — Thinking about results in 2021, where did you get your information from?

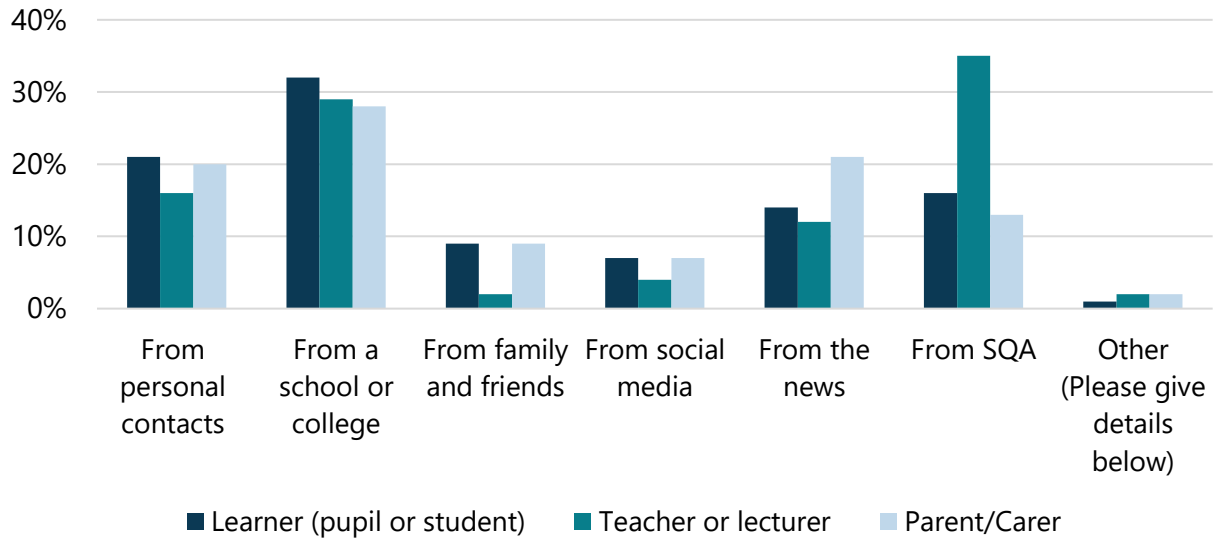
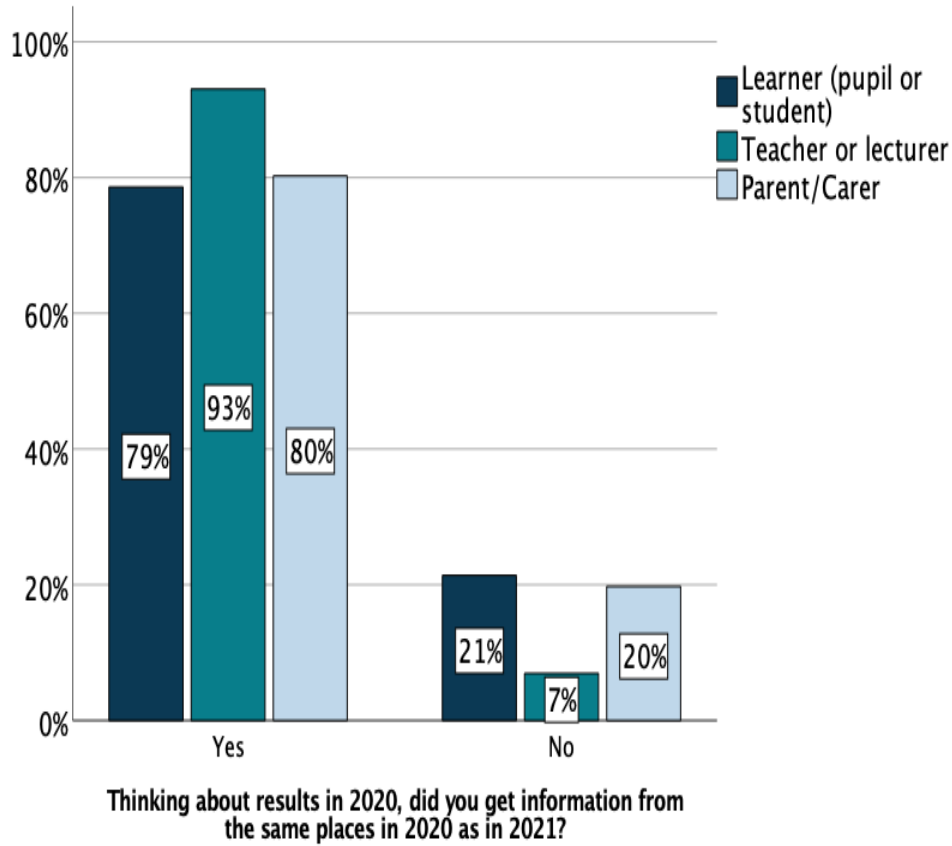


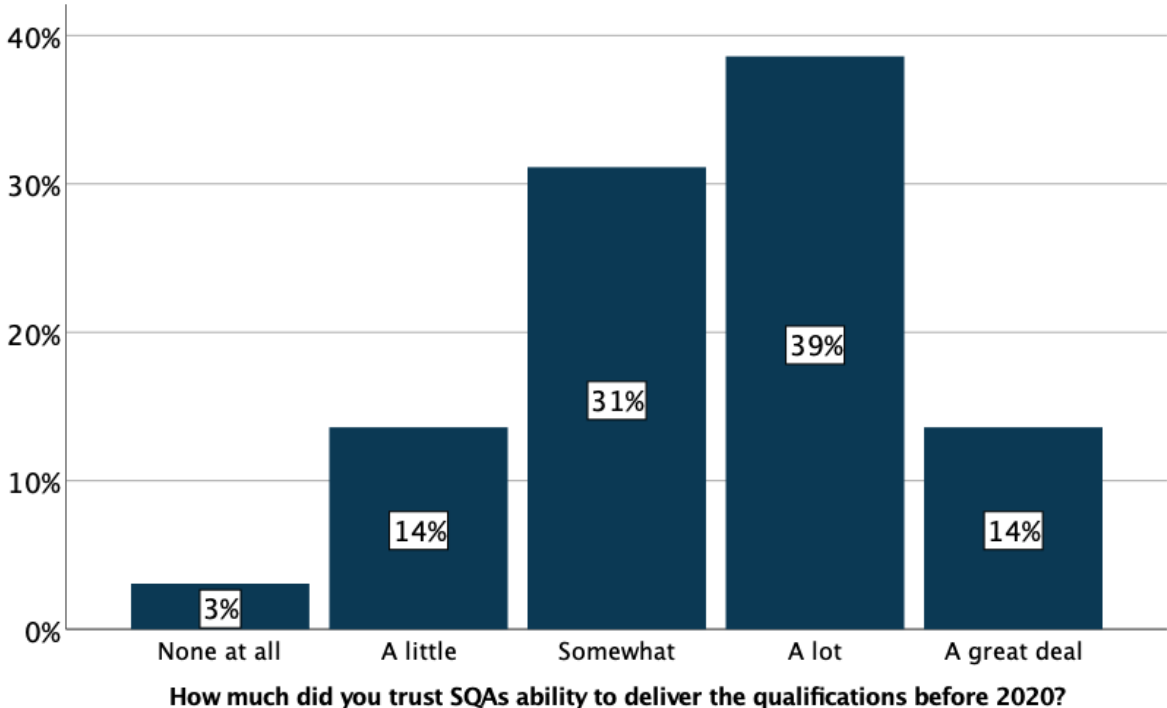
Figure 4.3.2 — Did you get information from the same place in 2021 as 2020?

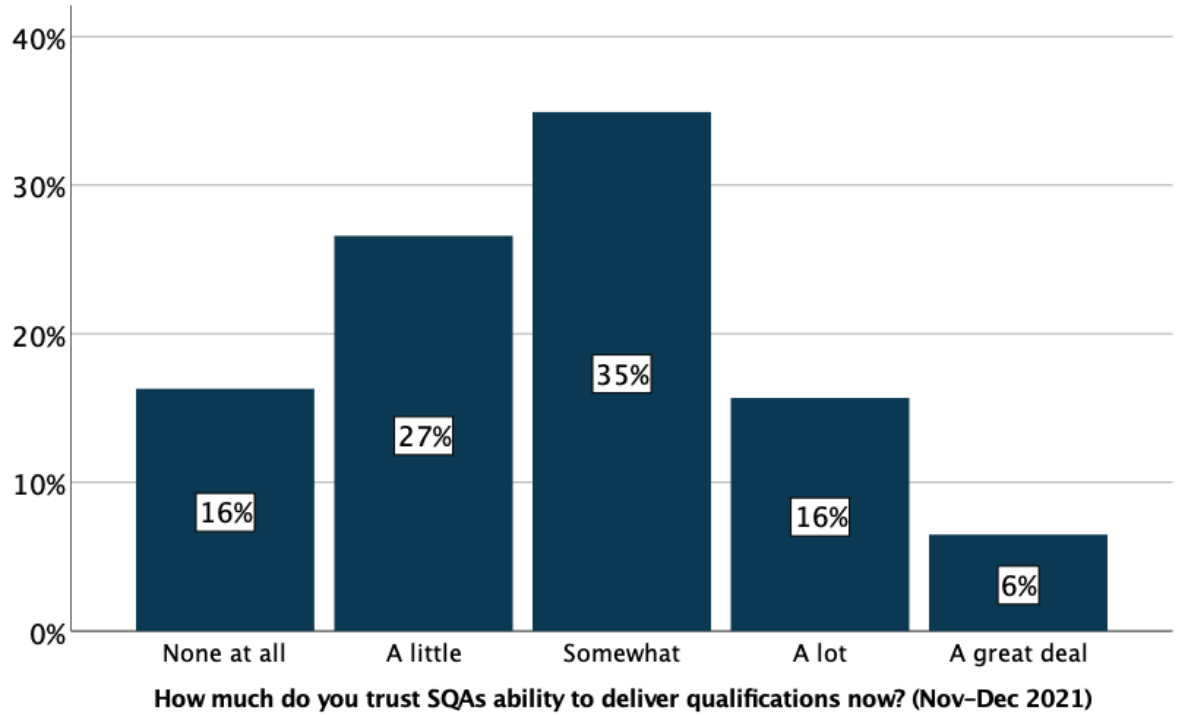




Much of the discourse surrounding the impact of COVID-19 on assessment and standards in Scotland has highlighted a degradation of trust in the SQA in 2020 and 2021 (Carrell, 2020; Imrie, 2020; Kippin & Cairney, 2021), and our findings aligned with this. While the majority reported that they trusted SQA before 2020, the survey suggested a decrease in the amount of trust in SQA to deliver qualifications, with 43% of respondents reporting a little or no trust in 2021 compared to 17% before 2020 ( Figure 4.3.3).

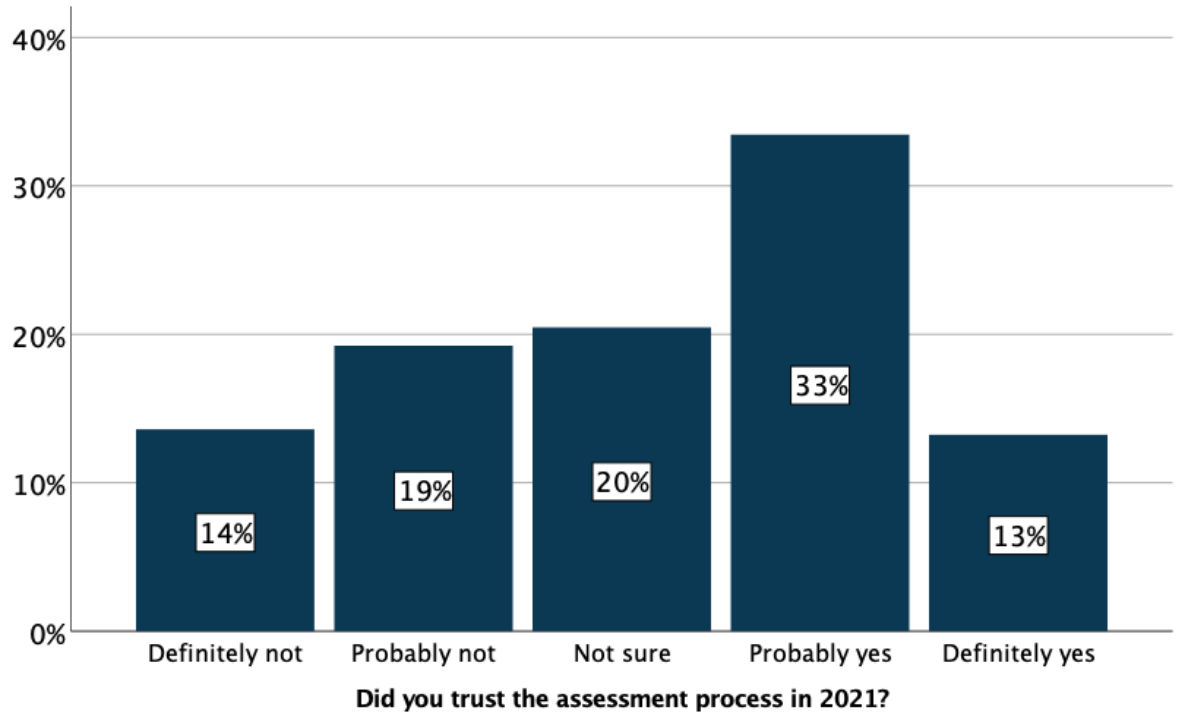
*Figure 4.3.3 — How much did you trust SQA’s ability to deliver qualifications? (before 2020 and in November 2021) — whole sample*





Despite this reported reduction in trust of SQA, nearly half (46%) of respondents trusted the process of assessment in 2021 (Figure 4.3.4). One third of respondents did not trust the process.

*Figure 4.3.4 — Do you trust the process of assessment in 2021?*



In their free text responses, stakeholders tended to report unfavourably regarding the degree to which they trusted SQA, writing that regular changes were communicated poorly and that the process lacked transparency.

*The catastrophic events of the past two years have shattered my trust in the SQA.*

(Learner)

Respondents who did report trusting the process described high levels of trust in their immediate networks — in teachers or their own schools and contrasted this with high levels of distrust for ‘the system’, ‘SQA’ or ‘other schools’. The theme of schools gaming the system was repeated again here.

*My son's school invested a lot of time and effort in the assessment process and ensured that a very full body of work, showing a progression, existed. I understand from other schools that this was not the case everywhere.*

(Parent/Carer)

*In our school, teachers were equipped, it was fair, there was a system and policy that was quality assured. I know I was more rigorous than some in my policy and approach, but I have been an appointee at SQA for 20 years, so I know standards and procedures. Were the other schools near us doing the same? No. Did my learners read the open-source papers online at home and have an advantage? Possibly yes, but we had no proof to say for sure. We altered papers so they were not the same, we did two assessments to corroborate the grades.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

However, those with less positive relationships with their teachers sometimes described the process as overly reliant on teachers who, in their views were prone to bias and favouritism.

*Some students did not receive the grades they would have gotten in an exam setting due to teacher bias against them.*

(Learner)

Finally, it was common for respondents to report unfavourably on SQA for decisions or circumstances that were outside of the SQAs remit, such as access to online learning material.

*remove the inequality / unfairness by funding education system correctly*

(Parent)

*class behaviour may have impacted grades*

(Learner)

Those respondents that did report still having a high level of trust for the SQA wrote that they felt the best had been made of a tough situation and that SQA had perhaps been a ‘scapegoat’ during a time in which everyone had struggled to respond to the disruption caused by the pandemic.

*They have been made a scapegoat by the government so therefore trust has been eroded which makes it difficult to maintain status quo.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

#### **4.4 Teacher assessment**

Teacher assessment is the term generally used when the teacher or lecturer marks or grades their own students’ work. The decision to use teacher assessment as the basis for awarding grades in 2021 was generally seen as the best decision under incredibly difficult circumstances. While the majority of respondents (76% overall) felt that the use of teacher assessment was the right decision (Figure 4.4.1), fewer respondents (53% overall) were convinced that this was fair (Figure 4.4.2). Respondents associated with independent schools were least likely to report that they felt the use of teacher assessment was fair (Figure 4.4.3) and those associated with FE colleges were most likely to think that it was fair. This could reflect experiences with various kinds of assessment since vocational assessments tend to be graded by teachers in normal years.

Figure 4.4.1 — Do you think that using teacher assessed grades was the right decision?

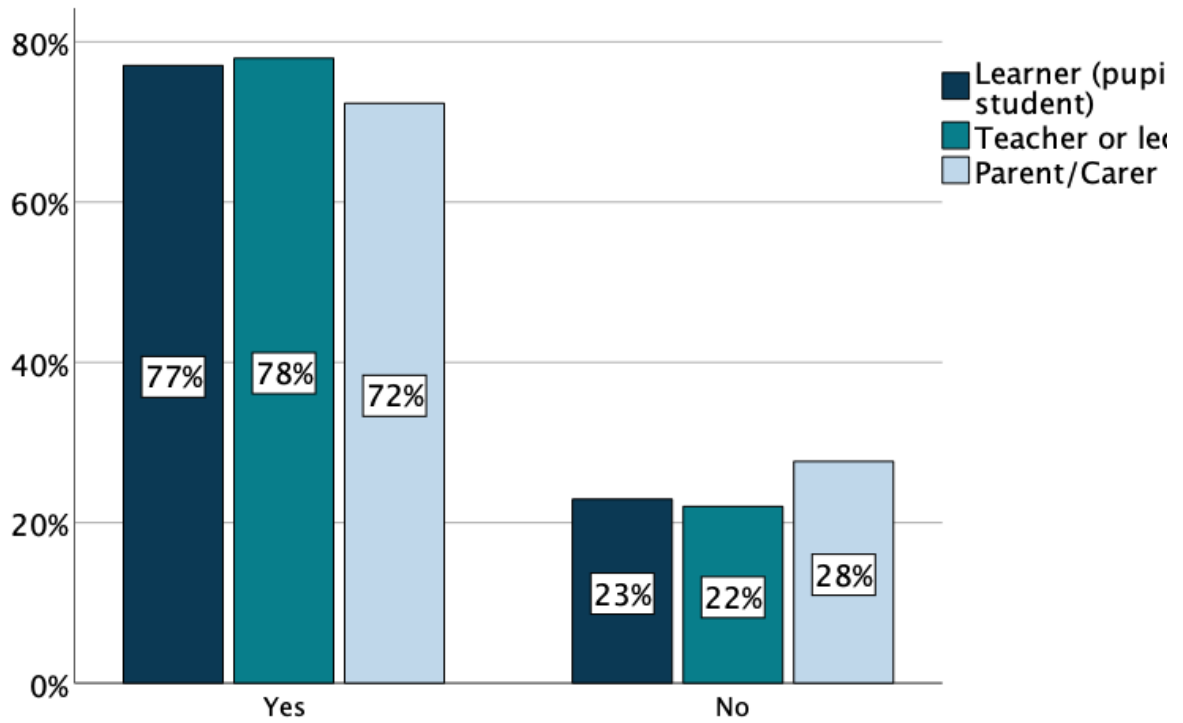


Figure 4.4.2 — Do you think using teacher grades was fair?

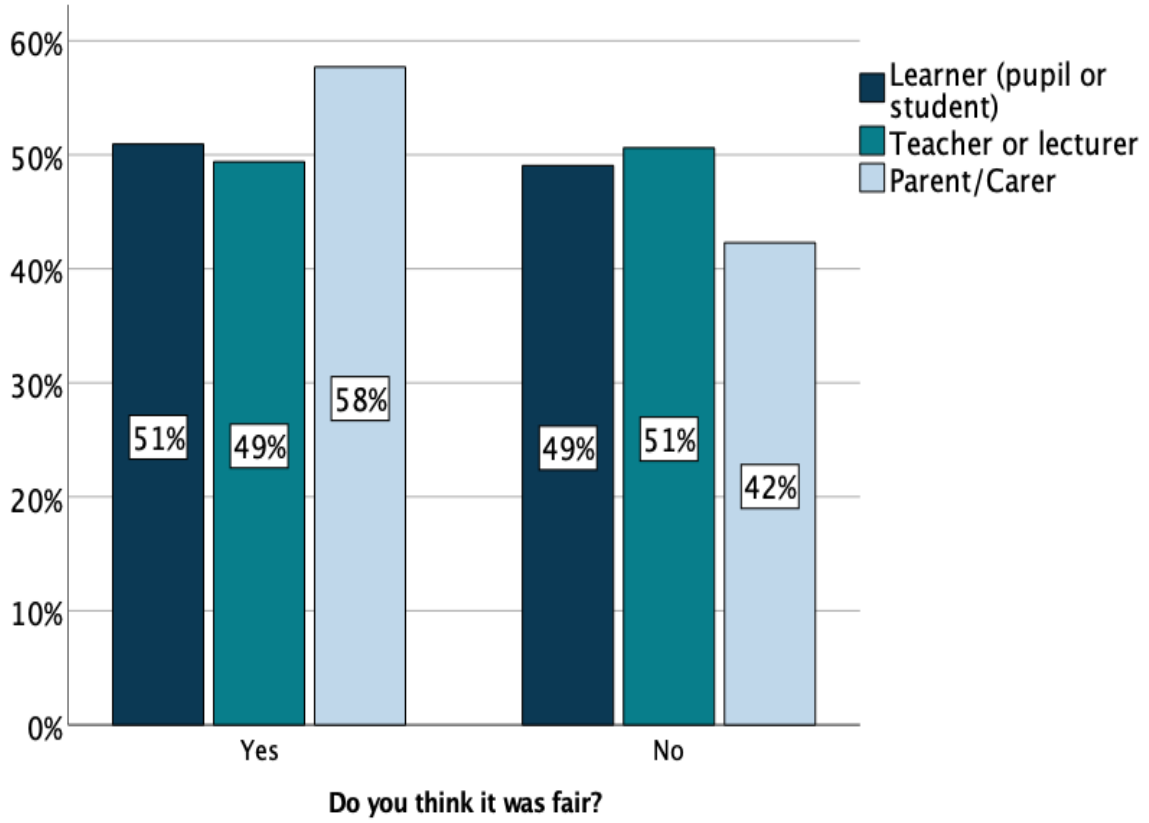
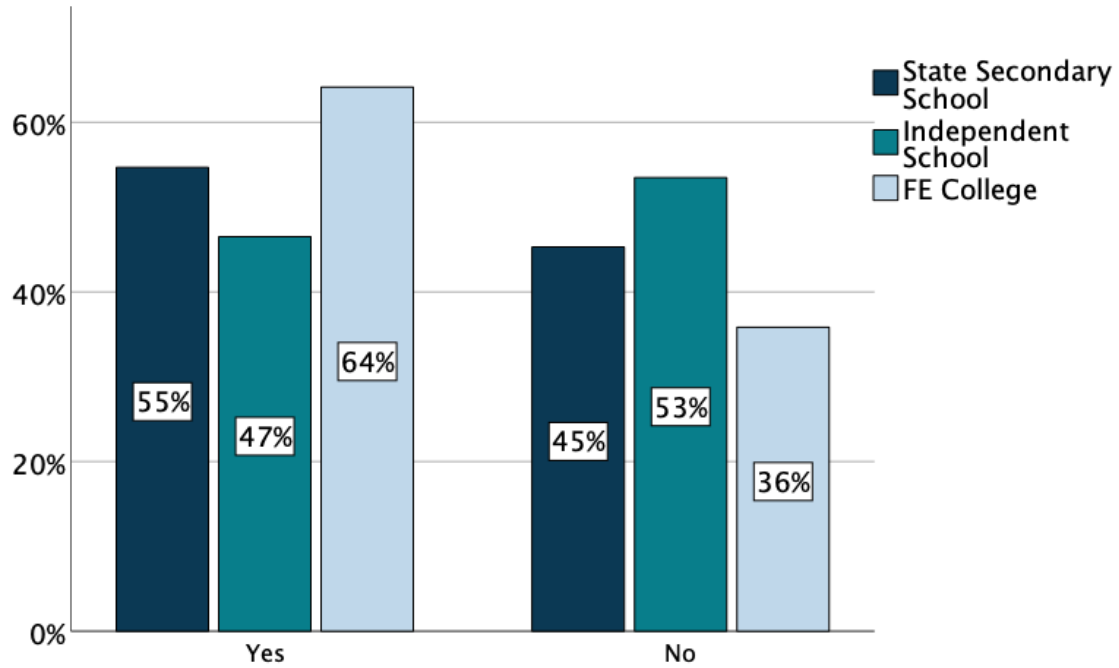
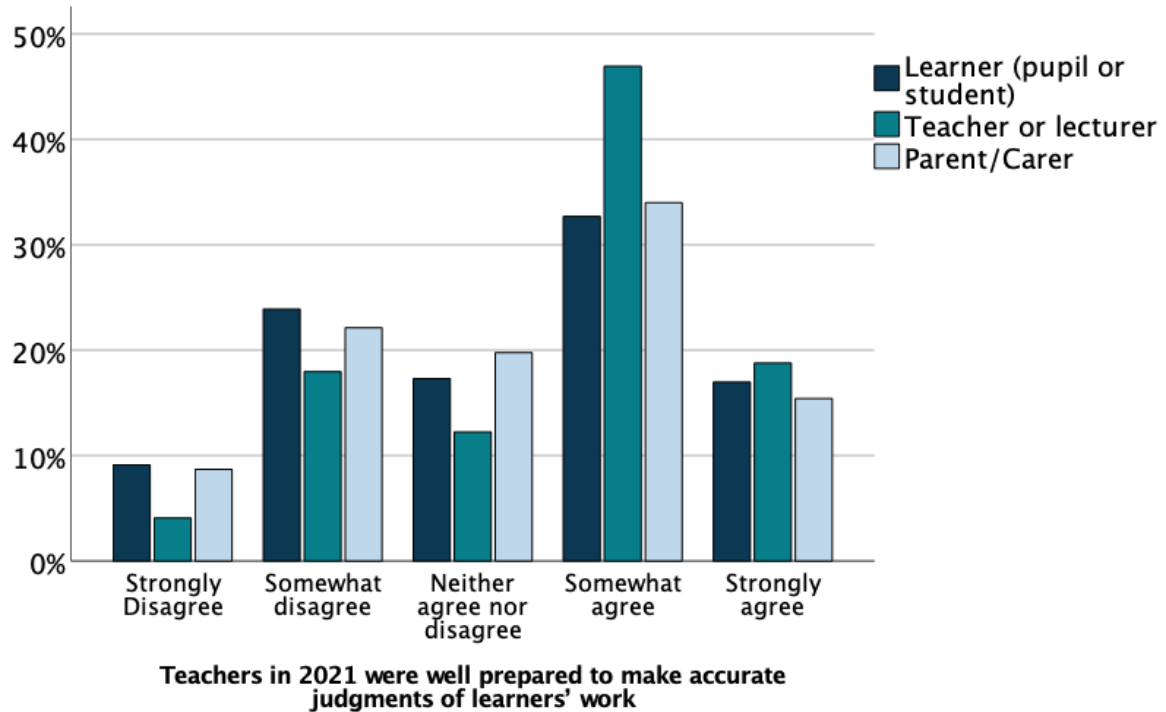


Figure 4.4.3 — Was the use of teacher assessment fair? – by association with educational institution type



There was relatively high level of trust in teacher and lecturer capabilities with the majority (56%) of respondents agreeing that teachers were well prepared to make judgements of learners' work (Figure 4.4.4). In contrast, only 28% of respondents do not trust teacher preparedness to make accurate judgements. It is reassuring that the group who rated teacher preparedness most highly were teachers themselves.

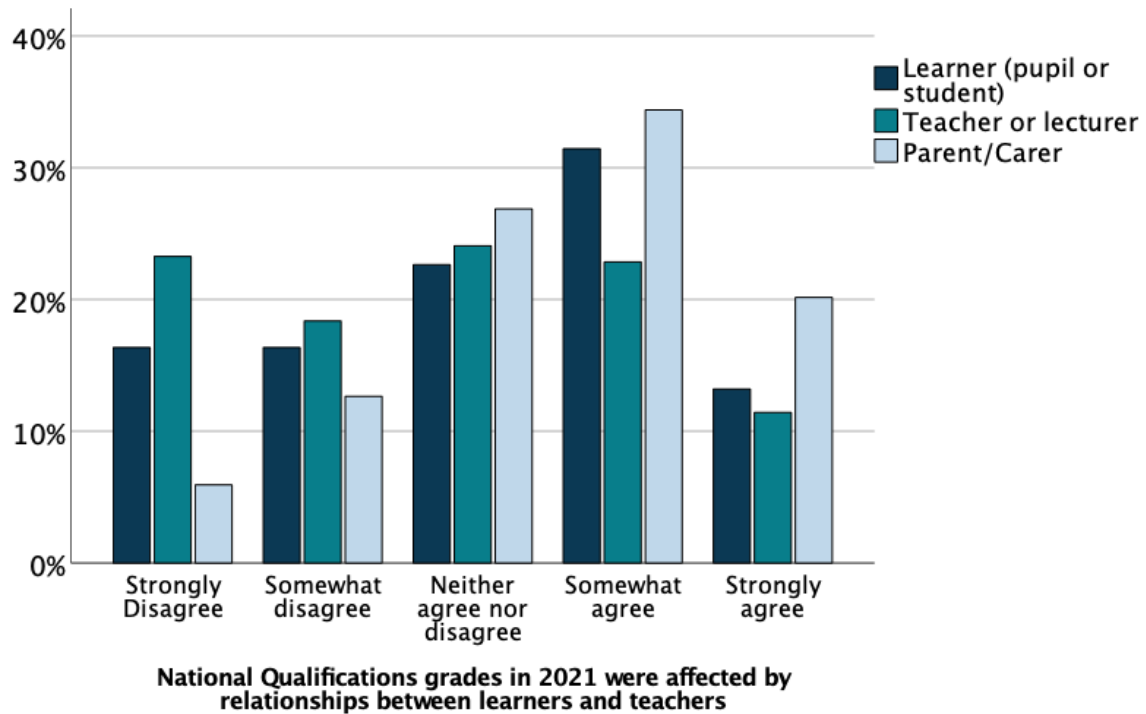
Figure 4.4.4 — Teachers in 2021 were well prepared to make accurate judgements about learners' work



There was a slight tendency for respondents to agree with the statement that relationships between teachers and learners had an influence on the grades awarded in 2021 — 45% agreed and 31% disagreed. However, teachers themselves were more likely to disagree with this statement – 34% agreed and 42% disagreed (Figure 4.4.5).

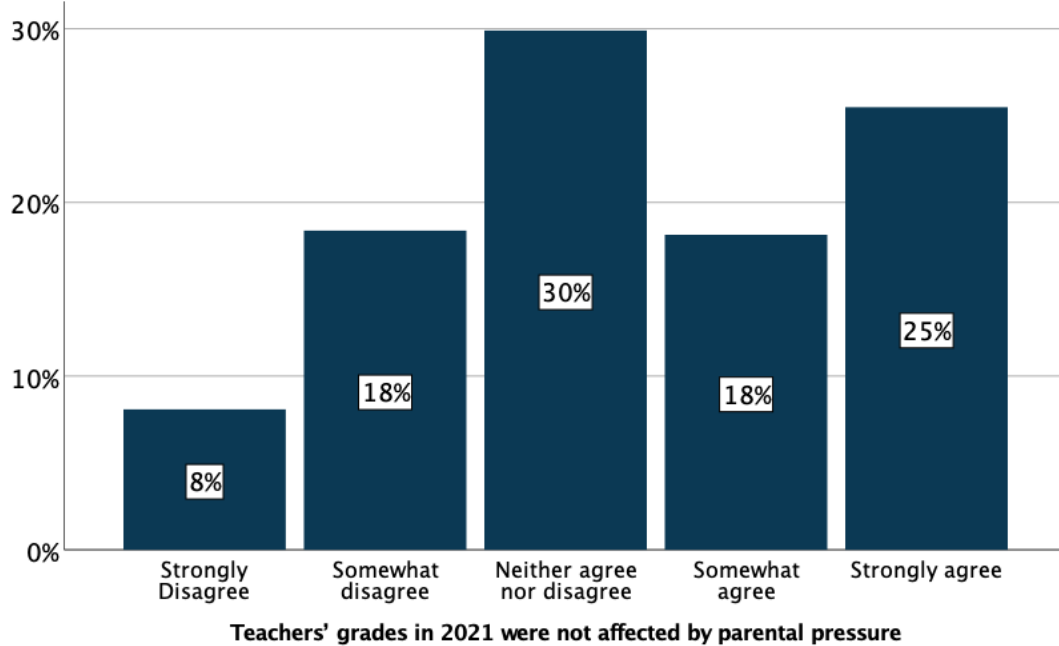


Figure 4.4.5 — National Qualification grades in 2021 were affected by relationships between learners and teachers



Influence of parental pressure on teacher assessment was reported as a concern by 26% of respondents (Figure 4.4.6). As such, any national system that uses teacher assessment must have strong safeguards in place to protect against bias of various kinds.

Figure 4.4.6 — Teacher grades in 2021 were not affected by parental pressure



In free-text responses, respondents tended to be mostly positive about teacher assessments as a part of a qualification system. Many respondents felt it allowed for a broader and more detailed assessment of learners:

*Teachers have a very good knowledge of the abilities of their pupils, and how that translates into a particular grade.*

(Parent/Carer)

*Exams do not entirely show how a student performs — a student may be fantastic in a classroom environment but do worse in an exam hall while the opposite can also be true. So, getting an overall picture by a teacher is better than a snapshot from an exam.*

(Learner)

*Teachers will have made judgements on a pupil's work ethic, knowledge and understanding across a whole year, as opposed to just one day in their life. This gives a more accurate judgement of what level the pupil is at by the end of the year. I have taught pupils who have achieved 'A' standard work right up until the final exam when stress, nerves, sickness, home struggles have hindered their ability to show their full potential.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

There was an awareness of the potential for grade inflation, with lots of responses suggesting inflation was an inevitable consequence if the qualification system relied solely on teacher grades:

*... any time a teacher is involved in student grading there is grade inflation*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

Another concern was that teacher assessment had sometimes become examinations by another name, with learners in particular reporting that they sat more exams than in previous years under the guise of providing evidence:

*They just ran SQA papers under a different name and with more room for cheating and grade inflation*

(Learner)

*We basically sat exams anyway – it was in an exam hall, we had exam papers, and I am led to believe, our grades were largely based on that exam – the difference made was that we did not get exam leave, there was more cheating as people sat the same papers at different times, it was reported that we did not sit real exams, so those grades may not be worth as much, and there was a lot more stress*

(Learner)

Overall, respondents tended to report that the use of teacher assessment was the best available option in this instance and that, accompanied by between-school moderation processes, it could make up an element of a qualification system in the future:

*It was in principle a good idea and I think Scotland could use this system again. However, I do not think there was adequate moderation and a general understanding of standards*

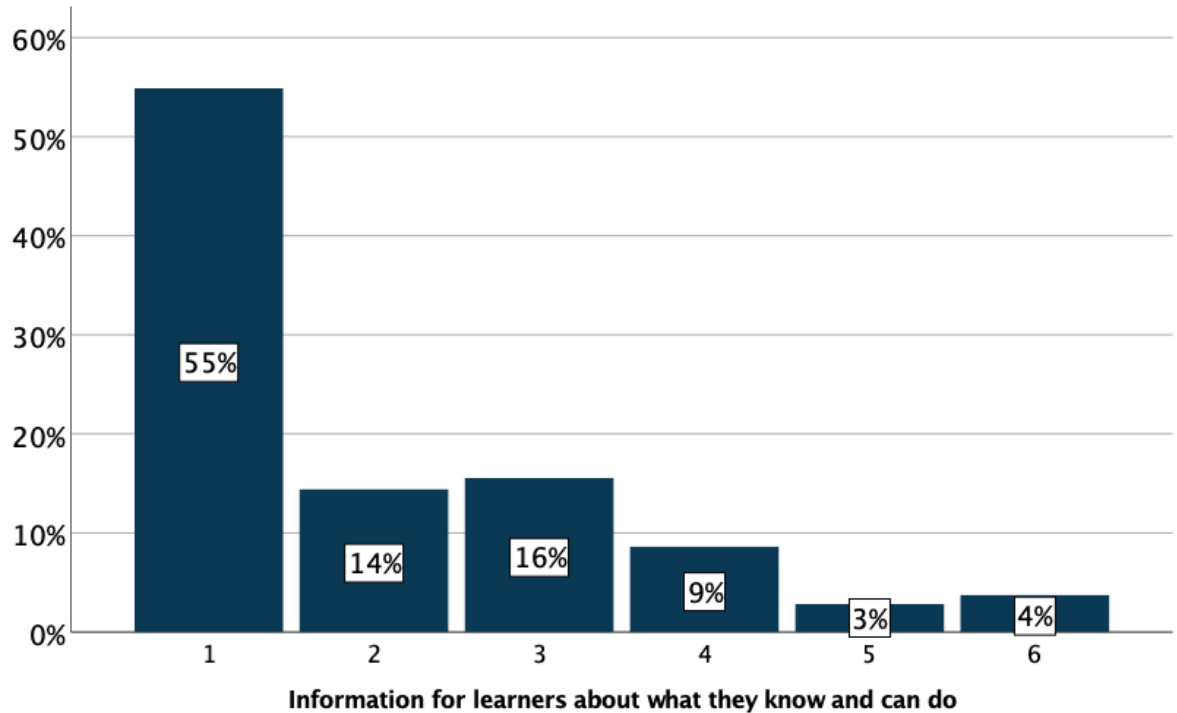
(Teacher/Lecturer)

#### **4.5 The future of assessment in Scotland**

Respondents were asked to rank what they felt was the most important purpose of NQs. The majority of respondents (55%) ranked “Information for learners about what they know and can do” as the most important purpose (Figure 4.5.1).

Figure 4.5.1 — Ranking 'Information for learners about what they know and can do'

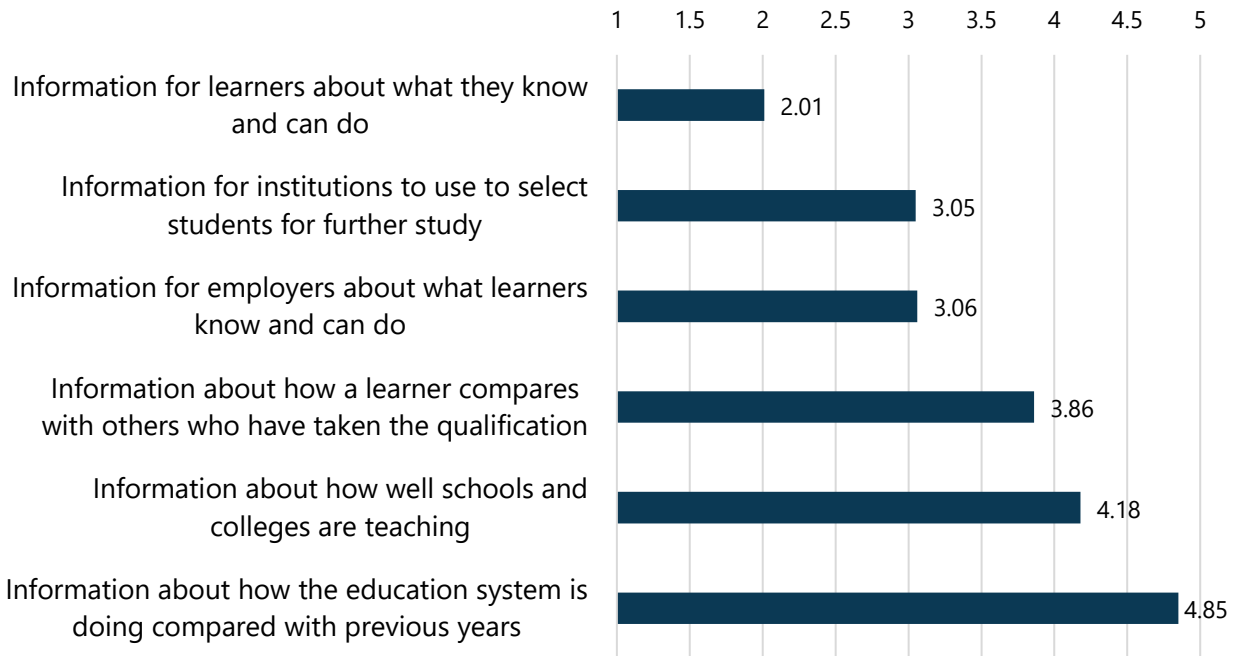
Key: 1 = most important



Taking the mean value of the ranks for each statement illustrates both a general ranking of importance of each of these statements, which was relatively consistent across each group, and categorises statements into three groups of decreasing perceived importance (Figure 4.5.2). Stakeholders were primarily concerned with feedback for the learner, followed by information for educational institutions or employers and were least concerned about using the assessment data to evaluate schools and colleges or the national education system.

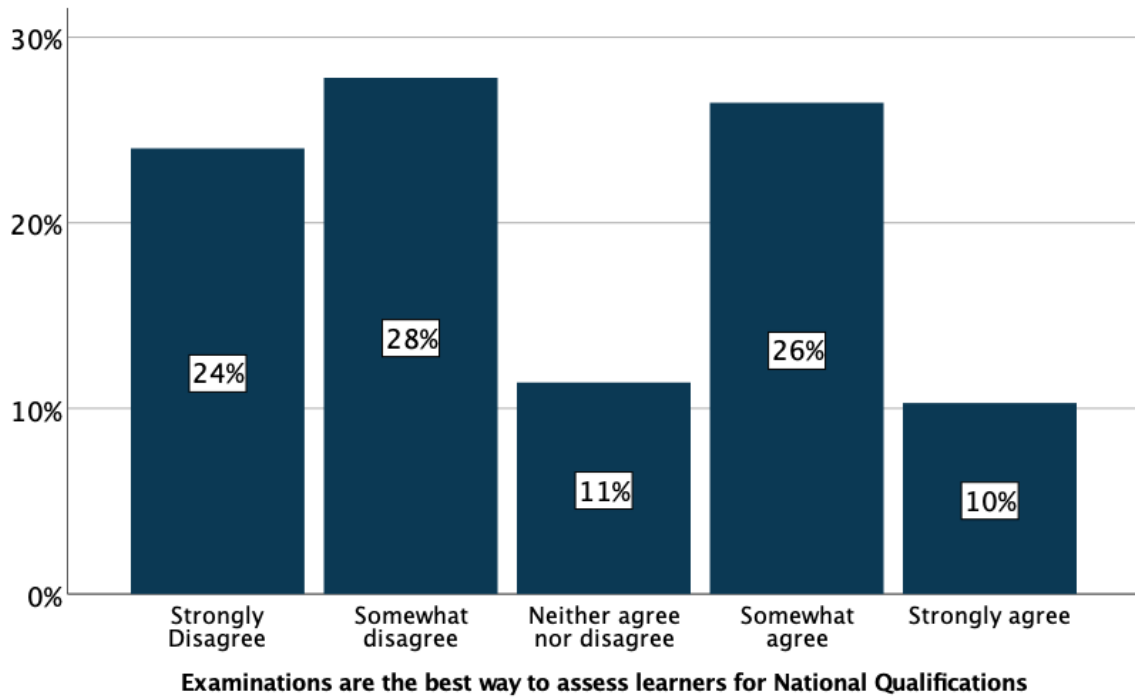
Figure 4.5.2 — Mean Rank Values of Purposes of National Qualifications

Key: 1 = most important



Amongst questionnaire respondents, there was no consensus over whether examinations were the best way of assessing learners (Figure 4.5.3). The absence of national examinations during the pandemic led to a desire from some students to be able to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through this approach but the findings of this questionnaire also indicate support for teacher assessment, rather than a clear preference for one format.

Figure 4.5.3 — Examinations are the best way to assess learners for National Qualifications



There was an overwhelming (80%) sense that changes of some kind needed to be made to the assessment system (Table B.12). An essential element of a changed assessment and qualification system in the future may include choice. The majority of respondents agreed with the statements that schools and learners should have some choice of assessment for NQs — 64% and 59% respectively (Figure 4.5.4 and Figure 4.5.5).

Figure 4.5.4 — Schools should have some choice about the assessments used for National Qualifications

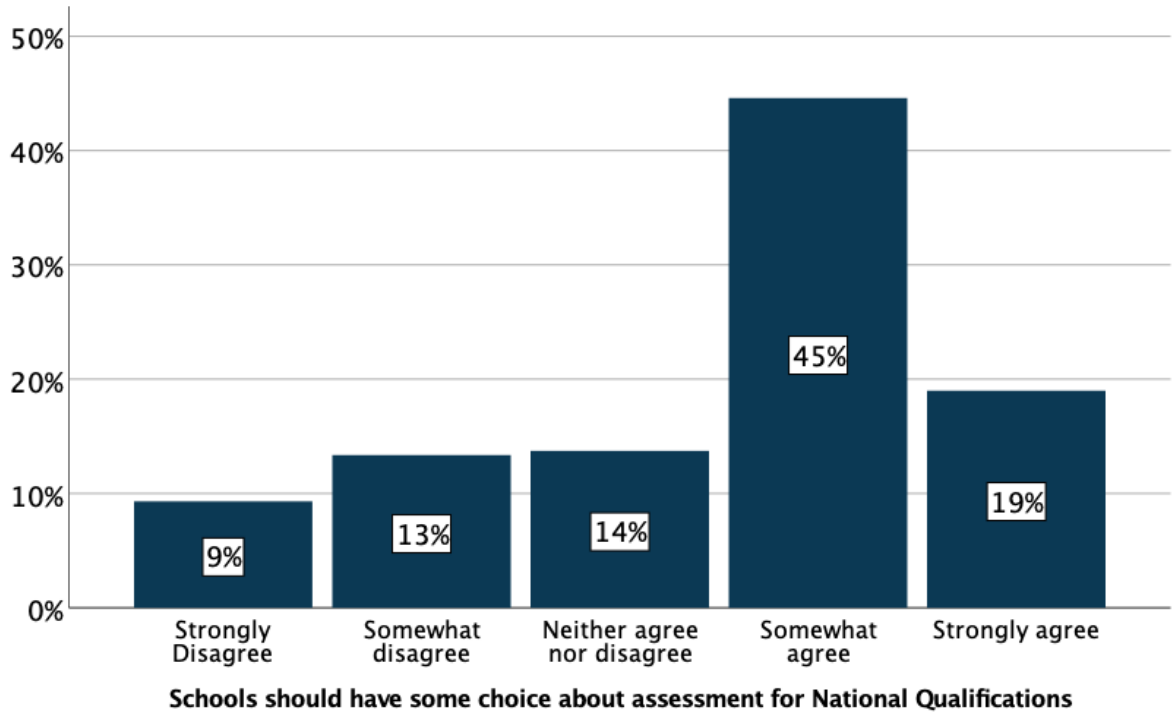
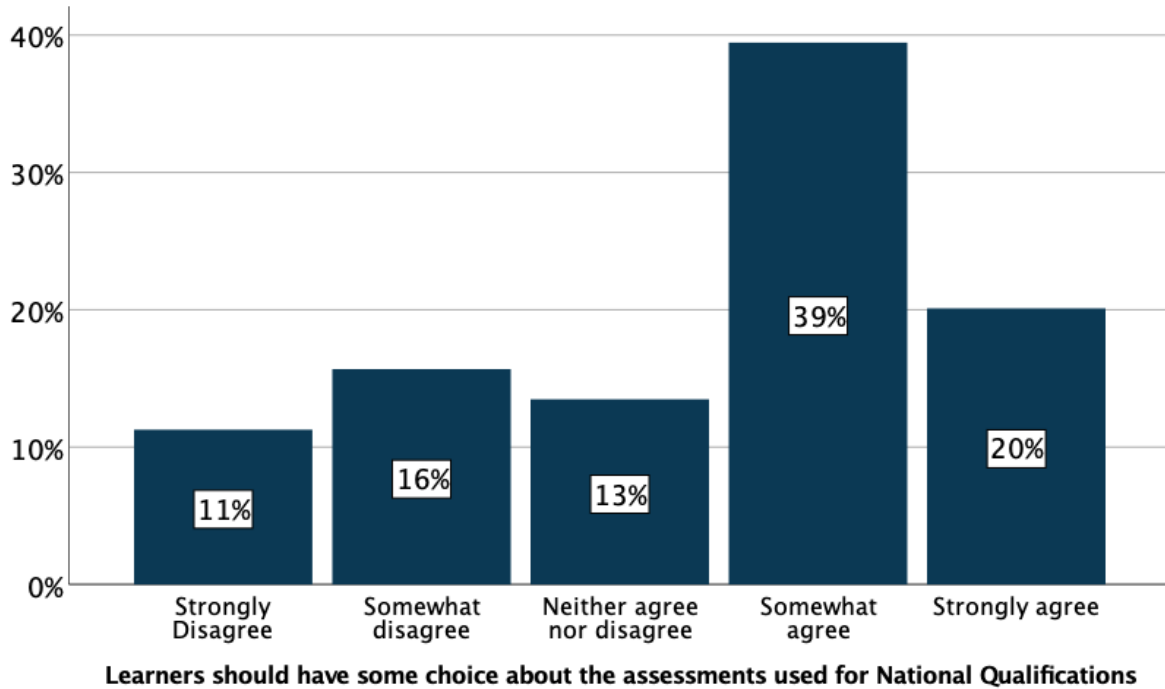


Figure 4.5.5 — Learners should have some choice about the assessments used for National Qualifications



#### 4.6 Lessons learned from navigating a pandemic

While the free-text responses were highly varied, an overwhelming desire for change was evident. In particular, respondents repeatedly expressed a view that the current system was over-reliant on exams and there were calls for greater diversification of the assessment methods. Respondents felt that there should be more trust in teachers, with the argument that they knew their students best. This included more continuous assessment for students, with some participants suggesting that would take the pressure off students and would help those students who responded better to different ways to testing:

*Because the students are put under less pressure if the grade is based on a variety of continuous assessments*

(Learner)

*I would like much more continuous assessment, with an optional exam at the end for those who have not made as good a progress as they had hoped throughout the year, to give them the opportunity to demonstrate where they are by the end. Universities are phasing out exams — they really do only measure the performance on one day and are extremely stressful for those sitting them*

(Parent)



*Some of the lessons learned about the use of digital portfolios and moderation across schools was very useful and will be a contribution to raising standards if kept in place.*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

Equally, the importance of rigorous moderation processes to prevent similar grade inflation and the inevitable degrading of standards that would accompany this was emphasised:

*Ongoing assessment is a valuable tool to measure performance and SQA should focus on consistency of quality and standards across schools are met*

(Parent/Carer)

*We need good moderation inside and outside of schools. But teachers also need to have authority to award qualifications. This would not be questioned in any other profession, so why is it so problematic for the teaching profession?*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

Teacher workload was raised, since if the system were to rely on them more heavily, it would produce additional responsibilities:

*I think that 2021 has proved that teachers can, and should, be trusted to deliver the qualifications they know their pupils deserve. However, there was an enormous amount of stress placed on them in the previous examination periods, and so this examination process must be continuous to ensure that everyone has a fair chance, and that teacher workload is spread out.*

(Learner)

Many respondents felt that there needed to be more representation of student and teacher voice in decisions that are made regarding qualifications and assessment changes:

*Having more teachers involved at design stage and present on high level boards at SQA would massively support a more coherent approach to education and assessment across Scotland*

(Teacher/Lecturer)

*If my answers and those of my fellow pupils are listened to then I will be happy in knowing that our voices are heard.*

(Learner)

There was also a call to pay more attention to the mental health of young people who are navigating an increasingly complex world — making modifications to the assessment system that would reduce pressure could aid this.

*Take pressure off students. It is that simple. You take the pressure away, offer them collective evidence of the things that they have learned and grade them fairly in this way. Yes, this is harder for the teachers and there is more work to be done by them, but I believe it is the only fair way to award someone a qualification, by assessing their overall success rate and not just one exam.*

(Learner)

Finally, after 2 years of change, uncertainty and disruption, some respondents pointed out that making further changes runs the risk of placing yet more stress on teachers and learners:

*System changes cause a lot of stress*

(Learner)

## **5 Discussion**

Stakeholders' views on standards, trust and communication, teacher assessment and the future of assessment in Scotland are discussed below. Findings related to lessons learned from the pandemic have been integrated into these themes.

### **5.1 Standards**

A general view, from the analysis of responses to several items in the questionnaire, was that maintaining statistical outcomes at a national level was not prioritised. Instead, grading which represented learners' performances was deemed most important. A sizeable minority of respondents (41%) considered that qualification standards indicated an underlying ability, not just how the learner performed on the day. This view goes beyond grading which solely represents students' performances; the forced choice format in the questionnaire elucidated this point. Equally, approximately half of respondents considered that NQ standards represent both student performances and the national statistics. Thus, there were mixed and contradictory views regarding what standards should be and what they represent. As such, SQA and the Scottish Government cannot produce an assessment system that meets the expectations of all stakeholders, as represented in the responses to this questionnaire. Instead, policy decisions regarding the influence of statistics on standards and the extent to which outcomes represent performances and underlying abilities need to be communicated to stakeholders widely.

In terms of maintenance of standards, most respondents considered that standards were different from in previous years, but there was a wide spread of opinion as to whether the outcomes were easier or too generous. Respondents recognised the impact of the pandemic upon learning and no doubt took this into account when considering the ease or difficulty of the grading in 2020 and 2021. There was an overwhelming consensus that standards had not been equal across schools during the pandemic. We return to this issue below, in relation to the findings on teacher assessment.

### **5.2 Trust and communication**

Information about the assessments came from a large number of sources, including personal contacts, the news, family and friends and social media. However, the most frequently cited source of information for teachers and lecturers was from SQA, followed by their school or college. For learners and parents or carers, the most frequently cited source was the school or college. SQA's role in communicating both with schools and colleges and through the media directly to learners and their parents and carers is fundamental to the understanding of the national assessment system.

Over the course of the pandemic, with the crisis in qualification grading in 2020 and the ensuing public reports on the system, it was unsurprising that there had been a decline in trust in SQA. However, only one third of respondents indicated that they did not trust the system in 2021.

### **5.3 Teacher assessment**

Although there was broad support for the use of teacher grading during the pandemic, this was often seen as suitable approach under the circumstances. Opinion was divided as to whether it was fair. Those associated with independent schools were least likely to view teacher assessment as fair; a finding which may have been caused by grade inflation and therefore less distinction between the results in independent and state schools. Overall, there was a view that teachers were well prepared to make the assessments; a view particularly held amongst teachers themselves. However, a sizeable minority considered that the relationships between teachers and learners and parental pressure influenced grading. These findings point to the need for a well-developed system of moderation which addresses these potential sources of bias where teacher assessment is used, since it is a feature of current assessments as well as likely to feature in assessment reforms. Teacher workload will need to be considered should teacher assessment be given more emphasis in assessment reform.

### **5.4 The future of assessment in Scotland**

Four out of five respondents considered that some reform to the assessment system was needed. Interestingly, the most important purpose for NQs was identified as providing information for the learner on what they know and can do. Use of assessment data for evaluation of education systems was not prioritised by stakeholders. Choice about the form of assessment for schools and for learners was supported by approximately three out of five respondents. There was support for a national system that includes examination and teacher assessment. These findings indicate support for a learner-focused assessment system which allows for choice, flexibility and adaptation to their different skills and contexts. Better representation of teachers' and learners' voices in the design of future assessments was called for. Finally, attention was drawn to the impact of assessment and of future reforms on learners' mental health.

### **5.5 Limitations of the research**

The topic matters addressed in this research are of relevant to all of Scottish society. While 918 respondents constituted a large sample of stakeholders, the sample for this survey was voluntary and therefore not representative of Scottish society in general. Nonetheless, this is a large sample of stakeholder views on these topics that deserve to be taken seriously.

Naturally, respondents' views will have been influenced by the pandemic and the media reaction to ongoing public commentary and reports on the assessment system in Scotland. Thus, the findings must be interpreted with this context in mind.

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## 7 Appendix A — Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey.

In this survey, we wish to ask you questions related to your experience of assessments for qualifications. Your responses will help us to build a picture of what worked and what did not in the way results were provided to Scottish learners in the summer of 2020. We also want to know what you think about assessments in 2021 and in the future. We are also keen to understand what really matters for public trust to be built in standards in qualifications. When we refer to NQs in this survey, we talk about National 5, Highers, and Advanced Higher courses.

This survey takes approximately 10 mins to complete, and your responses will remain completely anonymous. This survey is being run using software known as Qualtrics and has been designed and will be analysed by researchers at the University of Oxford and the University of Glasgow.

Q1

Which category best describes you?

- Learner (pupil or student)
- Teacher or lecturer
- HEI (Higher Education Institution) admissions staff
- Parent/Carer
- Other

---

Q1a What type of educational institution are you (or your child) associated with?

▼ State Secondary School (4) ... Other (8)

---

Q1b. If you selected other, please give details here

---

---

Q2a What is your age?

---

Q2b How would you describe your gender?

- Male
  - Female
  - Non-binary / third gender
  - Prefer not to say
- 

Q2c What is the highest qualification you hold?

▼ Level 1 qualification such as National 1; Awards or equivalent (1) ... Doctorate, Professional Apprenticeship (12)

---

Q2d What is your local authority?

▼ Aberdeen City Council (1) ... Don't know (33)

Q2e How would you describe your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.

- Scottish
  - Other British
  - Irish
  - Gypsy/Traveller
  - Polish
  - Any other White ethnic group, please describe
- 
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, please describe
- 
- Other ethnic group
  - Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British
  - Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British
  - Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British
  - Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British
  - Any other Asian, please describe
- 
- African, African Scottish or African British
  - Any other African, please describe
- 
- Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British

- Black, Black Scottish or Black British
- Any other Caribbean or Black, please describe

- 
- Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British
  - Any other ethnic group, please describe
- 

Q3 Which of the following would you say is the most important purpose of National Qualifications? Please rank the following options.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Information for learners about what they know and can do
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information about how a learner compares with others who have taken the qualification
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information about how well schools and colleges are teaching
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information about how the education system is doing compared with previous years
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information for employers about what learners know and can do
- \_\_\_\_\_ Information for institutions to use to select students for further study

Q4 Which of these statements are most important to consider when thinking about qualification standards? Rank these statements in order of importance

- \_\_\_\_\_ The proportion of students getting a particular grade stays the same each year.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two students getting the same grade in the same subject in the same year possess the same skills and knowledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Two students getting the same grade in the same subject across different years possess the same skills and knowledge.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The value of the same grade across two different subjects should be the same.

Q5 In 2021, there was a government decision to base results for National Qualifications on teacher grades (with SQA guidance).

-----

Q5a Do you think that was the right decision?

- Yes
- No

-----

Q5a

Please explain why or why not.

---



---

Q5b Do you think it was fair?

- Yes
- No

---

Q5b Please explain why or why not?

---

---

Q6 Thinking about results in 2021, where did you get your information about National Qualifications? Please choose all that apply.



- From personal contacts with pupils, teachers and so on
- From a school or college
- From family and friends
- From social media
- From the news
- From SQA
- Other (Please give details below)

---

Q6b If you selected 'Other' please give details here

---

---

Q7 Thinking about results in 2020, did you get info from the same places in 2020 as in 2021?

- Yes
- No

Q8

National Qualifications were easier in 2021 than they normally are

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q9 National Qualifications grades were too generous in 2021

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q10 Standards within National Qualifications were the same across all schools in 2021

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q11 National Qualifications grades in 2021 were affected by relationships between learners and teachers

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q12 Teachers in 2021 were well prepared to make accurate judgements of learners' work

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
-

Q13 Lost learning time in 2021 made it impossible for learners to perform at the standards normally required for the grades

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q14 Learners with 2021 National Qualifications grades will struggle when they go on to further study or employment because they missed learning when compared to learners with the same grades awarded in previous years

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q15 Teachers' grades in 2021 were not affected by parental pressure

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q16 Less time was spent on preparing students for assessment in 2021 than in normal years

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q17 Did you think the results awarded in 2021 were fair?

- Definitely not

- Probably not
  - Not sure
  - Probably yes
  - Definitely yes
- 

Q18 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

---

Q19 Were standards in 2020 and 2021 the same as what they were prior to the changes brought in by COVID-19?

- Yes
  - No
- 

Q20 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

Q21 Did you trust the assessment process in 2021?

- Definitely not
  - Probably not
  - Not sure
  - Probably yes
  - Definitely yes
- 

Q22 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

---

Q23 How much did you trust the National Qualifications results before 2020?

- None at all
- A little

- Somewhat
  - A lot
  - A great deal
- 

Q24 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

Q25 How much did you trust SQAs ability to deliver the qualifications before 2020?

- None at all
  - A little
  - Somewhat
  - A lot
  - A great deal
- 

Q26 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

Q28 How much do you trust SQAs ability to deliver qualifications now?

- None at all
  - A little
  - Somewhat
  - A lot
  - A great deal
- 

Q29 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

Q30 For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one with which you agree the most. There will be a chance at the end to say if you did not agree with any of the options.

	1 (1)	2 (2)	
The most important element for assessment standards is consistency of teachers' judgements between schools	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	The most important element for assessment standards is consistency of teachers' judgements within schools
It is important that the number of students that receive each grade remains about the same every year.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	It is important that grades are based on individual student skills and knowledge.
Qualification standards tell you about people's underlying abilities, not just how they performed on the day	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Qualification standards tell you about performances on the assessment
Qualification standards take into account both students' performances and the national statistics	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Qualification standards only take into account students' performances

Q31 Were there any statements above where you would have liked to say something else?

---



---

Q32 Examinations are the best way to assess learners for National Qualifications

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q33 Schools should have some choice about assessment for National Qualifications

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q34 Learners should have some choice about the assessments used for National Qualifications

- Strongly Disagree
  - Somewhat disagree
  - Neither agree nor disagree
  - Somewhat agree
  - Strongly agree
- 

Q35 Would you like changes to be made in assessment for National Qualifications?

- Yes
  - No
- 

Q36 If you would like to give details to explain your answer, please use the space below.

---

Q37 What lessons do you think should be learned about standards for assessments that will help when we are not living in a pandemic?

---

---

Q38 Is there anything you would like to tell us about National Qualifications standards that we have not asked you in this survey?

---

Q55 This survey is now complete. Thank you so much for your time. Your insights will be invaluable. We would like to ask you to respond to a few questions related to your experience of this survey.

---



## 8 Appendix B — Additional data from the questionnaire

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## Demographics

Figure B.1 — How old are you?

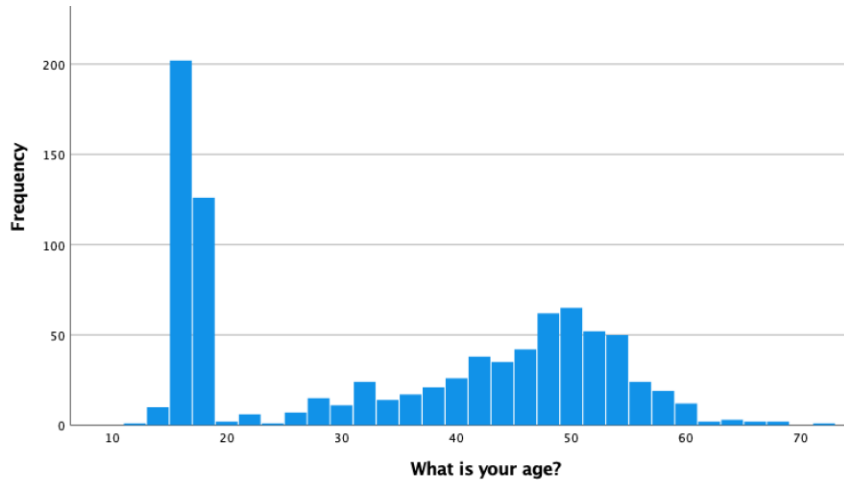


Figure B.2 — How would you describe your gender?

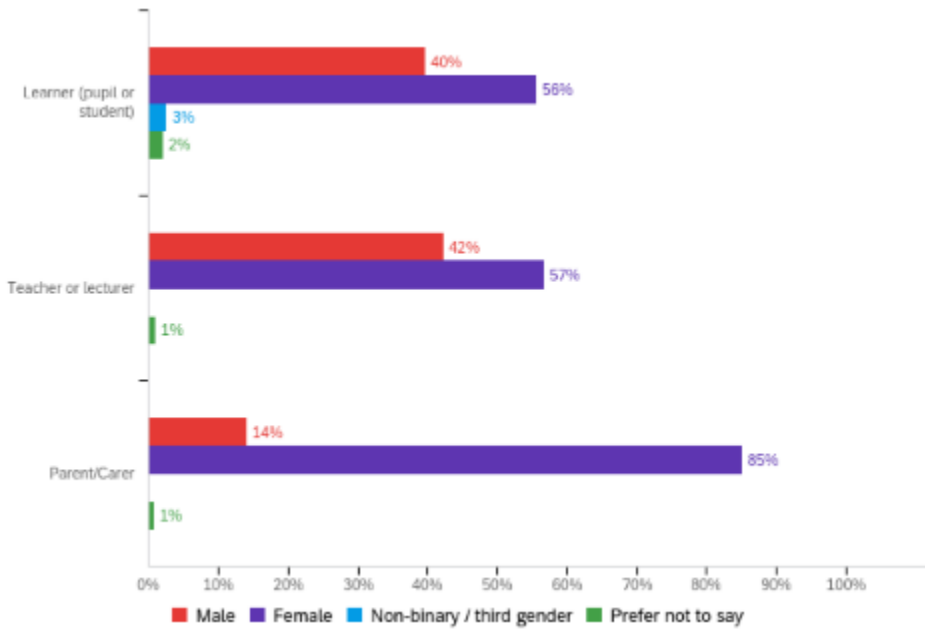


Figure B.3 — What is the highest qualification you hold?

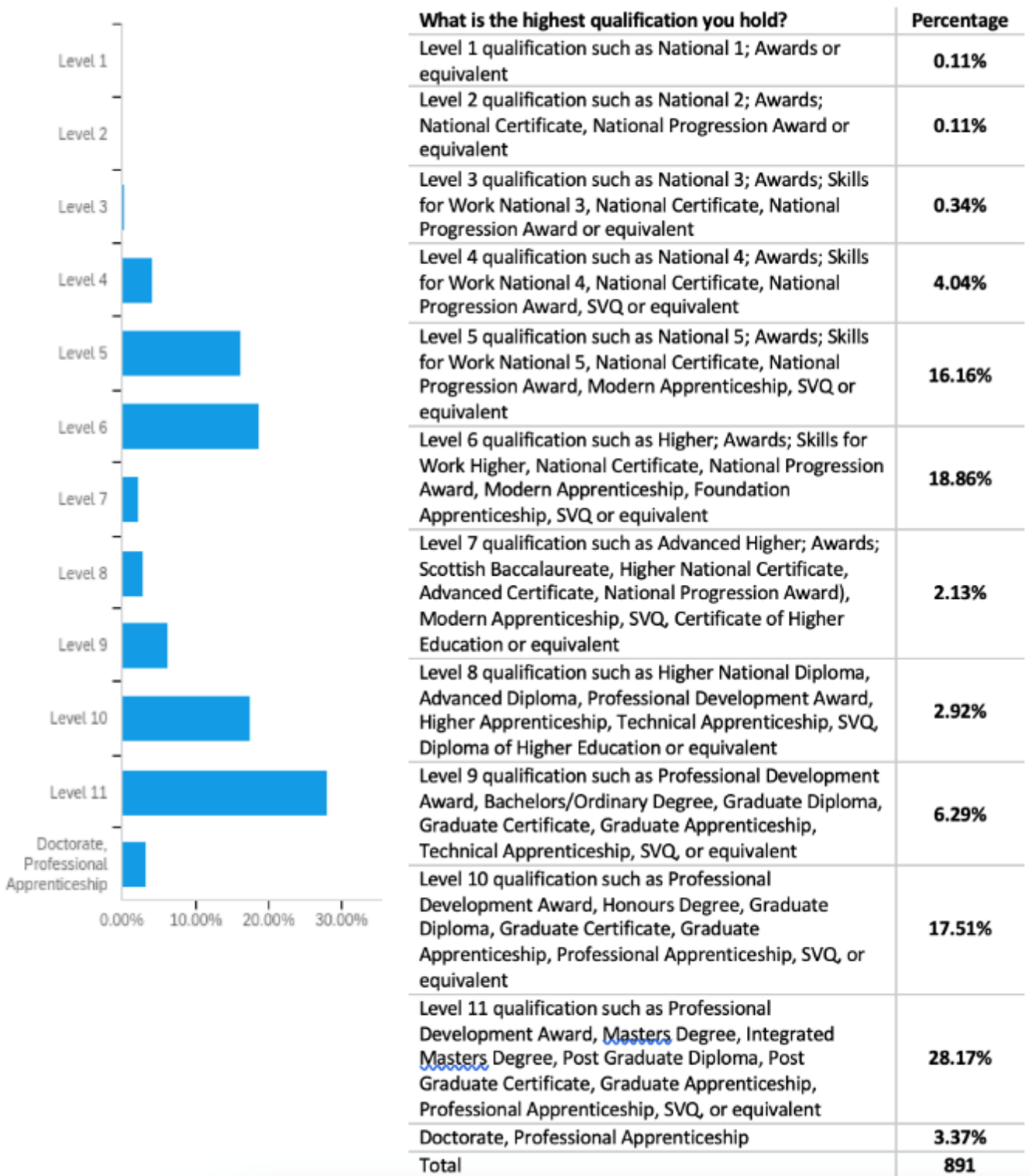
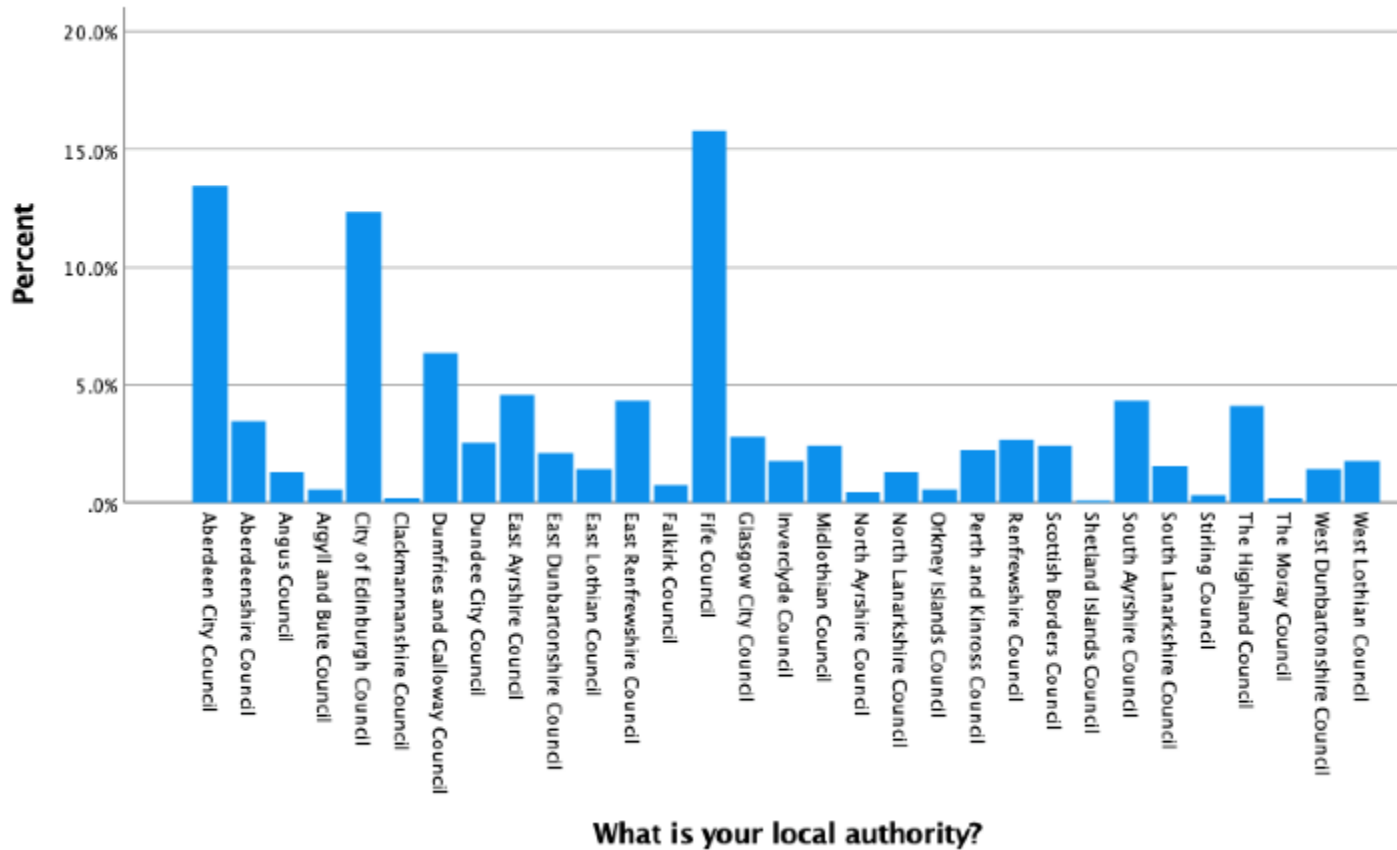
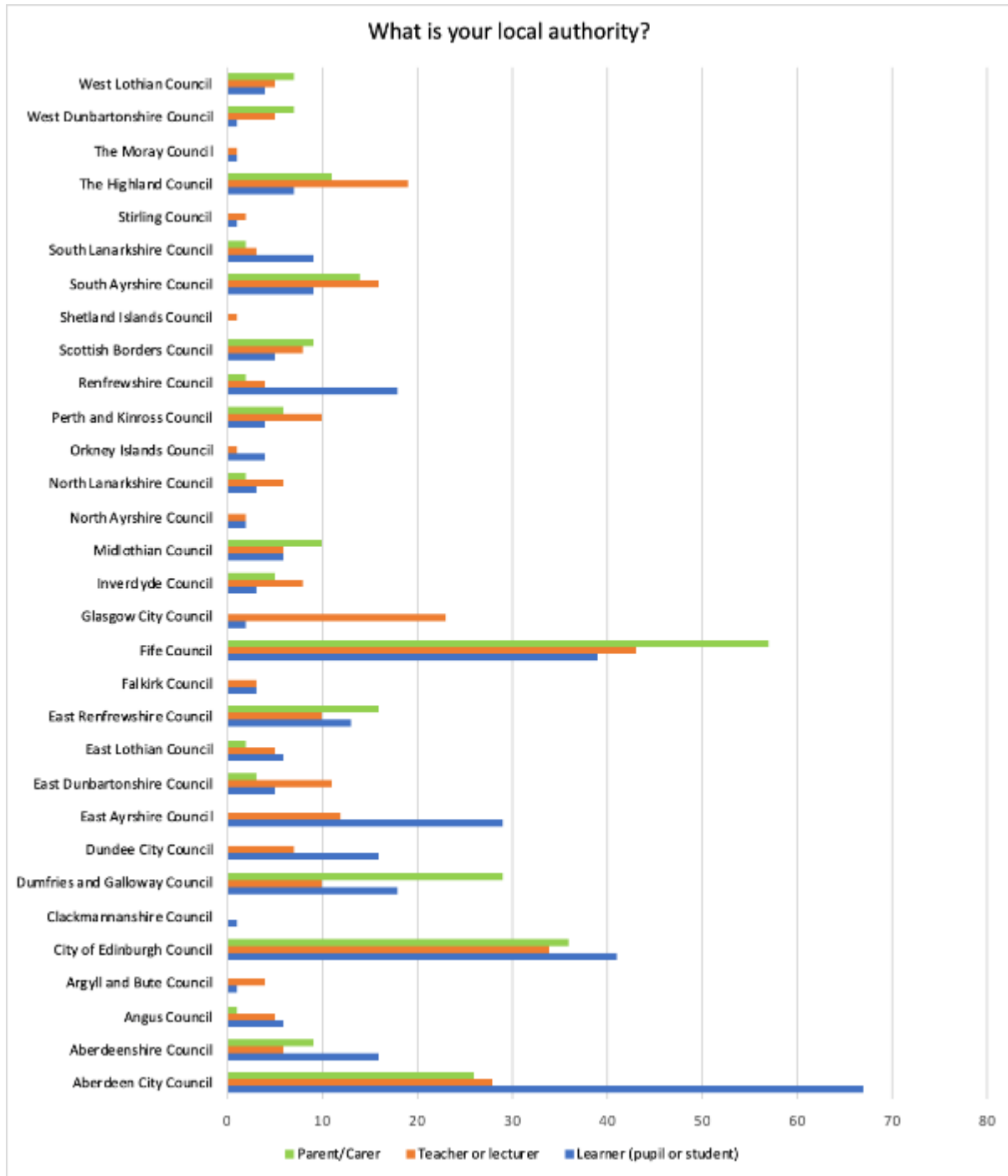


Figure B.4 — What is your local authority?



What is your local authority?	Percentage	What is your local authority?	Percentage
Aberdeen City Council	13.47%	Inverclyde Council	1.78%
Aberdeenshire Council	3.45%	Midlothian Council	2.45%
Angus Council	1.34%	North Ayrshire Council	0.45%
Argyll and Bute Council	0.56%	North Lanarkshire Council	1.34%
City of Edinburgh Council	12.36%	Orkney Islands Council	0.56%
Clackmannanshire Council	0.22%	Perth and Kinross Council	2.23%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	0.00%	Renfrewshire Council	2.67%
Dumfries and Galloway Council	6.35%	Scottish Borders Council	2.45%
Dundee City Council	2.56%	Shetland Islands Council	0.11%
East Ayrshire Council	4.57%	South Ayrshire Council	4.34%
East Dunbartonshire Council	2.12%	South Lanarkshire Council	1.56%
East Lothian Council	1.45%	Stirling Council	0.33%
East Renfrewshire Council	4.34%	The Highland Council	4.12%
Falkirk Council	0.78%	The Moray Council	0.22%
Fife Council	15.81%	West Dunbartonshire Council	1.45%
Glasgow City Council	2.78%	West Lothian Council	1.78%

Figure B.5 — What is your local authority? (by respondent type)



*Figure B.6 1— How would you describe your ethnic group? Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background.*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Scottish	75.60%
Other British	12.09%
Irish	1.76%
Gypsy/Traveller	0.00%
Polish	0.77%
Any other White ethnic group, please describe	3.30%
Mixed or multiple ethnic groups, please describe	0.77%
Other ethnic group	0.33%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	0.99%
Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British	0.66%
Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British	0.22%
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	0.44%
Any other Asian, please describe	0.55%
African, African Scottish or African British	1.21%
Any other African, please describe	0.11%
Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British	0.11%
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	0.33%
Any other Caribbean or Black, please describe	0.11%
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	0.33%
Any other ethnic group, please describe	0.33%
Total	910

Standards

*Table B. 1 — National Qualifications were easier in 2021 than they normally are*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	16.45%
Somewhat disagree	18.63%
Neither agree nor disagree	27.34%
Somewhat agree	26.25%
Strongly agree	11.33%
Total	918

*Table B. 2 — Lost learning time in 2021 made it impossible for learners to perform at the standards normally required for the grades*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	4.90%
Somewhat disagree	12.96%
Neither agree nor disagree	9.59%
Somewhat agree	36.38%
Strongly agree	36.17%
Total	918

*Table B. 3 — Were standards in 2020 and 2021 the same as what they were prior to the changes brought in by COVID-19?*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	29.08%
No	70.92%
Total	918

## Trust and communication

*Table B. 4 — Thinking about results in 2021, where did you get your information about National Qualifications?*

	<b>Learners</b>	<b>Teachers/ Lecturers</b>	<b>Parents/ Carers</b>
From personal contacts with pupils, teachers and so on	21.32%	16.43%	19.81%
From a school or college	32.03%	29.11%	28.46%
From family and friends	9.38%	2.23%	8.81%
From social media	7.06%	4.04%	6.76%
From the news	13.52%	11.84%	21.23%
From SQA	16.08%	34.82%	12.74%
Other (Please give details below)	0.61%	1.53%	2.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>718</b>	<b>636</b>

## Teacher assessment

*Table B. 5 — In 2021, there was a government decision to base results for National Qualifications on teacher grades (with SQA guidance). Do you think that was the right decision?*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	75.60%
No	24.40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>918</b>



*Table B. 6 — In 2021, there was a government decision to base results for National Qualifications on teacher grades (with SQA guidance). Do you think it was fair?*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	52.61%
No	47.39%
Total	918

*Table B. 7 — Teachers in 2021 were well prepared to make accurate judgements of learners' work*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	7.41%
Somewhat disagree	21.02%
Neither agree nor disagree	16.01%
Somewhat agree	38.34%
Strongly agree	17.21%
Total	918

*Table B. 8 — National Qualifications grades in 2021 were affected by relationships between learners and teachers*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	15.80%
Somewhat disagree	15.80%
Neither agree nor disagree	24.29%
Somewhat agree	30.17%
Strongly agree	13.94%
Total	918

The future of assessment in Scotland

*Table B. 9 — Which of the following would you say is the most important purpose of National Qualifications?*

Statement	Rank					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
■ Information for learners about what they know and can do	55%	14%	16%	8%	3%	4%
■ Information about how a learner compares with others who have taken the qualification	7%	17%	16%	25%	14%	21%
■ Information about how well schools and colleges are teaching	5%	8%	15%	22%	35%	15%
■ Information about how the education system is doing compared with previous years	2%	5%	7%	18%	29%	39%
■ Information for employers about what learners know and can do	13%	30%	23%	14%	11%	9%
■ Information for institutions to use to select students for further study	18%	26%	22%	13%	9%	12%

*Table B.10 — Mean Rank Values of Purposes of National Qualifications*

Statement	Mean rank
Information for learners about what they know and can do	2.01
Information about how a learner compares with others who have taken the qualification	3.86
Information about how well schools and colleges are teaching	4.18
Information about how the education system is doing compared with previous years	4.85
Information for employers about what learners know and can do	3.06
Information for institutions to use to select students for further study	3.05

*Table B.11 — Examinations are the best way to assess learners for National Qualifications*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Disagree	23.09%
Somewhat disagree	28.43%
Neither agree nor disagree	11.22%
Somewhat agree	26.03%
Strongly agree	11.22%
Total	918

*Table B.12 — Would you like changes to be made in assessment for National Qualifications?*

	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	80.50%
No	19.50%
Total	918