



Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment

2023–24 National Qualifications

Appeals and Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS)

Section 1: Background and context

Approach to impact assessment

This document summarises the evidence that SQA has reviewed on EECCS and Appeals for National Courses that relate to impacts on children’s rights and wellbeing. SQA supports lifelong learning, and awards qualifications to learners of all ages, but many learners taking SQA graded National Courses are aged 15, 16 or 17 and would identify as young people.

SQA reviewed the range of available evidence to inform its decisions in the context of its duties as the statutory national awarding body in Scotland for qualifications other than degrees. These duties are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996, as amended.

In October 2022, the National Qualifications Policy Team carried out engagement on the arrangements for the assessment of National Courses with learners, parents and carers, practitioners, SQA qualification teams, National Qualification Support Teams, SQA’s Advisory Council, SQA’s Qualifications Committee, the NQ2023 Working Group and the NQ2023 Strategic Group. The NQ2023 Working Group and NQ2023 Strategic Group included representation from: the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland (ADES), Colleges Scotland, Education Scotland, the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), School Leaders Scotland (SLS), the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS), the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), the Scottish Government, the National Parent Forum of Scotland, and the Scottish Youth Parliament.

Section 4 sets out the assessment of the impact of the Appeals and EECC services in session 2023–24 for National Courses in relation to children and young people’s rights and wellbeing.

Section 2: CRWIA Stage 1 Screening: key questions

1. Name the policy and describe its overall aims.

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) 2024

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) will support children and young people who have been unable to attend an examination or children and young people whose performance in the examination may have been affected by a personal circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day. There is no charge for this service, and it is available for all examinations that appear in the examination timetable. Exceptional circumstances are circumstances that are unplanned and fundamentally affect the ability of children and young people to attend or perform on the day in an examination.

Appeals Service 2024

The Appeals service provides children and young people with the opportunity to request a review of their SQA-marked assessment components. They can request a marking review of the materials that were submitted to SQA for marking should they have concerns about their final grade for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher courses.

2. What aspects of these services will affect children and young people up to the age of 18?

SQA supports lifelong learning, and awards qualifications to learners of all ages, but many learners taking SQA graded National Courses are aged 15, 16 or 17 and would identify as young people. Therefore, the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service and the Appeals service have the potential to affect those children and young people taking SQA graded National Courses in session 2023–24.

3. What likely impact — direct or indirect — will the service have on children and young people?

The arrangements for assessing National Qualifications in 2023–24 will enable children and young people to complete their selected National Courses and to be awarded grades that reflect their achievement. They will be able to celebrate their attainment and progress to continued education, training or employment where entry relies on SQA grades.

4. Which groups of children and young people will be affected?

SQA understands that 'child' means every human being below the age of 18, unless majority is attained earlier under the law applicable to the child. We also understand that our corporate parenting responsibilities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 not only apply to children who are looked after by local authorities, but also to young people up to the age of 26 who were looked after at age 16 or later.

5. Will this require a CRWIA?

Yes. As above, SQA recognises that the Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service and the Appeals service will impact on children and young people entered for National Qualifications courses.

Section 3: The CRWIA: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

SQA considers that the following articles are particularly relevant to arrangements for assessing national courses in session 2023–24:

- ◆ Article 2: non-discrimination
- ◆ Article 3: best interests of the child
- ◆ Article 12: respect for the views of the child
- ◆ Article 17: access to information from the media
- ◆ Article 23: children with a disability
- ◆ Article 28: right to education, and
- ◆ Article 29: goals of education

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) child-friendly descriptors have been set out below.

Article 2: non-discrimination

Children should not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of their rights. No child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parent/carer(s).

Article 2 also deals with discrimination based on most of the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act (2010), but it is not identical. For example, it deals with discrimination based on the characteristics and political opinions of a child's parents and guardians and on ‘activities’ and ‘property’.

Article 3: best interests of the child

Every decision and action taken relating to a child must be in their best interests. Governments must take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing — and that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform to established standards.

Article 12: respect for the views of the child

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

Article 17: right to information

Every child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of their social, spiritual and moral wellbeing and physical and mental health. The article is principally about the mass media but SQA recognises that the information it produces contributes to the fulfilment of article 17.

Article 23: children with disabilities

Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.

Article 28: right to education

Every child has the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender, or disability; if they are in detention; or if they are a refugee. While SQA does not determine the right to education in Scotland, it does have a responsibility to provide assessment and certification of SQA qualifications for learners.

Article 29: aims of education

Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.

Section 4: Assessment of impact and mitigations

Key elements

This part of the impact assessment further examines the key elements related to the provision of the EECCS and Appeals service in 2024, in line with the relevant UNCRC Articles as outlined in section 3.2.2 and considers:

- ◆ whether the arrangements may have different impacts on different groups of children and young people
- ◆ what mitigating actions might be adopted if a potential negative impact was identified for any area of rights or any group of children and young people
- ◆ where the arrangements for the EECCS and the Appeals service for National Qualifications in session 2023–24 can contribute to the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) 2024

Potential impacts on children and young people

The Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) will support children and young people who have been unable to attend an examination or children and young people whose performance in the examination may have been affected by a personal circumstance, or an unplanned incident on the day. There is no charge for this service, and it is available for all examinations that appear in the examination timetable.

Exceptional circumstances are circumstances that are unplanned and fundamentally affect the ability of children and young people to attend or perform on the day in an examination. This service supports children and young people who may, for example, be affected by a medical condition at the time of examination or bereavement, (which could occur before the examination) or particular domestic circumstances. As current public health advice in Scotland does not require a period of COVID-19 self-isolation, disruption at the time of examination, caused by COVID-19 or related COVID-19 conditions, is recorded as a medical

condition, as appropriate to the circumstances. It is important to note that centres are not required to specify the nature of the medical condition when submitting a request, but they must hold documentation such as a letter or statement from the head of centre confirming that it affected the child or young person.

Examination circumstances relate to instances where children and young people have been affected during the exam by a disruption, or other exam circumstance, reported by the chief invigilator. This includes situations where the centre fails to correctly implement a pre-agreed assessment arrangement.

Centre-accessed service

It is recognised that a potential negative impact on children and young people is the reliance on centres to submit a request for EECCS on the child or young person's behalf. While appropriate and clear guidance and support can be published for schools, colleges and training providers to refer to, SQA does not have the ability to effectively mitigate any potential inequity in how this service is being used.

When the EECCS process for 2022–23 was considered, SQA set up an external advisory group with a wide range of representatives including school and parent groups drawn from the National Qualifications Working Group 2022. This group was unanimous in its support for all requests to come via the head of centre in the interests of fairness to learners. This approach was also supported by the National Qualifications Strategic Group in 2022. In the interest of maintaining fairness to all learners across Scotland, SQA has continued with this approach in 2023–24. Learners do not have direct access to the EECCS service and this could result in bias or barriers to children and young people accessing the service. Responsibility for determining eligibility to use the service lies with the head of centre or their delegate.

Eligibility for the EECCS in 2024, as in previous years, is again determined by the school, college or training provider based on guidance provided by SQA and authorised by the head of centre or their delegate. In other words, centres access the service to help support fairness of access — there is no direct access for children and young people. Responsibility for determining eligibility to use the service lies with the head of centre or their delegate. This is important as it is the schools, colleges and training providers that are closer to the particular circumstances children and young people experience and so it is appropriate that they make these decisions in collaboration with their learners based on this developed understanding of their circumstances and the associated impacts. Also, centres are better placed to understand the specific requirements related to the submission of an EECCS request and as such can better support children and young people in deciding whether a request should be made. SQA has trust in the head of centre role to ensure use of the service is as legitimate, consistent and as fair as possible. It should be noted that Children and young people are required to give their consent to ensure they agree with a request being submitted on their behalf.

EECCS Appeals

EECCS appeals are available on two possible grounds. Heads of centre can appeal on a learner's behalf if they believe that SQA's decision to refuse an EECCS request that was submitted within the published timescales, based on all the evidence available to SQA at the

time, is wrong. Appeals can also be submitted if it is believed that there was procedural irregularity in SQA's handling of an EECCS request, which contributed to a decision that based on all the evidence available to SQA at the time, is wrong. An appeals panel may seek relevant information to inform its decision. An appeal for the EECCS is based purely on a process or administrative error made by SQA.

This process is not the same as the Appeals service for National Qualifications at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher. An appeal submitted on the grounds of a refusal of an EECCS request or procedural irregularity would be considered by an appeals panel consisting of SQA heads of service. If the panel uphold the appeal, the evidence may be reviewed by an SQA experienced examiner who was not involved in the original review, where this is appropriate. An outcome of this process is that a child or young person's grade could go up, down or stay the same. A downgrade will only occur in circumstances where the academic evidence submitted by the school, college or training provider clearly does not support the estimate. SQA has the responsibility to ensure that the integrity of its qualifications is maintained for these to be seen as credible and robust, as such a child or young person's attainment is based on demonstrated evidence. To mitigate the impact of such instances, SQA has produced guidance for teachers, lecturers and practitioners delivering National Courses. The guidance explains what estimates are and gives examples of the types of assessment evidence needed to ensure a robust estimate. SQA has also produced an online training course, delivered via SQA Academy, which assists teachers, lecturers and practitioners in producing estimates for National Courses, for gathering assessment evidence and applying national standards.

The EECCS has been developed to provide greater support to children and young people who experience disruption at the time of the exam. This service aims to ensure that children and young people impacted by a disruption or exceptional circumstance are still able to receive a grade that reflects their demonstrated attainment (article 2), particularly children and young people with a disability or ASN (article 23), and to allow them to achieve a qualification that would provide them with the skills, knowledge and understanding to allow them to progress to further and higher education or career pathway of their choosing (articles 3, 28 and 29). This approach also mitigates the real risk of the EECCS being perceived as an alternative to sitting the exam. Arrangements for assessing National Qualifications in 2024 are based on the central planning assumption that exams will take place. The policy makes it clear that the EECCS is a service designed to support children and young people who have experienced disruption which impacts them on the day of the exam (articles 2, 3, 23, 28 and 29).

EECCS Guidance for Centres

Feedback from SQA's Learner Panel suggested that the scenarios in previous EECCS guidance were open to interpretation and that this had the potential for bias from teaching practitioners about what is defined as a 'disruption' or 'exceptional circumstance'. SQA acknowledged this feedback from children and young people on SQA's Learner Panel and from those children and young people who participated in SQA's 2022 National Qualifications Evaluation research project (articles 2, 3, 12, 23, 28 and 29). Using this information, SQA has produced supportive guidance for centres, with input from key stakeholders, which provides centres with a framework to operate the EECCS. This includes greater clarity on the eligibility criteria for heads of centres to decide whether to submit a

request for this service. The guidance acknowledges that it does not and cannot reflect every possible scenario that may occur but does include clearer examples of likely scenarios to aid decision making. At the specific instruction of the Learner Panel, this guidance also highlights that personal exceptional circumstances can relate to situations where a learner has caring responsibilities that prevent their attendance at the exam or affects their performance (article 3 and 12). SQA also produces a 'Your Exams' guidance document which provides children and young people with information on the EECCS to ensure that they are aware that this service is available (article 17).

EECCS Appeals

An appeal submitted on the grounds of a refusal of an EECCS request or procedural irregularity would be considered by an appeals panel consisting of SQA heads of service. If the panel uphold the appeal, the evidence may be reviewed by an SQA experienced examiner who was not involved in the original review, where this is appropriate. An outcome of this process is that a child or young person's grade could go up, down or stay the same. The likelihood of the grade going down is small and would only occur in circumstances where the academic evidence submitted by the school, college or training provider clearly does not support the estimate.

SQA has the responsibility to ensure that the integrity of its qualifications is maintained for these to be seen as credible and robust, as such a child or young person's attainment is based on demonstrated evidence. To mitigate the impact of such instances, SQA has produced guidance for teachers, lecturers and practitioners delivering National Courses. The guidance explains what estimates are and gives examples of the types of assessment evidence needed to ensure a robust estimate. SQA has also produced an online training course, delivered via SQA Academy which assists teachers, lecturers and practitioners in producing estimates for National Courses, for gathering assessment evidence and applying national standards (articles 2, 3, 23, 28 and 29).

In instances where a child or young person was unable to attempt the exam, the EECCS relies on the academic evidence submitted by the school, college or training provider to assess and determine an appropriate grade. To mitigate potential negative impacts of this, schools, colleges and training providers are asked to ensure they keep children and young people informed as to what grade the evidence they produce throughout the year is assessed at, and this should match the centre estimate provided for them (articles 2, 3, 23, 28 and 29).

Steps taken by SQA to mitigate impacts

Centre-accessed service

When the EECCS process for 2022 was considered, SQA set up an external advisory group with a wide range of representatives including school and parent groups drawn from the National Qualifications Working Group 2022. This group was unanimous in its support for all requests to come via the head of centre in the interests of fairness to learners. This approach was also supported by the National Qualifications Strategic Group in 2022. In the interest of maintaining fairness to all children and young people across Scotland, SQA has continued with this approach in 2024. As the service is not directly accessed by children and young people, this may be regarded as not meeting the spirit of respecting the view of the child (article 12). However, as outlined above, schools, colleges and training providers are

closer to the particular circumstances children and young people experience, so it is appropriate that they make these decisions in collaboration with children and young people themselves. These decisions will therefore be based on a developed understanding of their circumstances and the associated impacts, thus in the best interests of the child or young person (article 3). Also, centres are better placed to understand the specific requirements related to the submission of an EECCS request and as such can better support children and young people in deciding whether a request should be made (article 3 and 17). Children and young people are required to give their consent to ensure they agree with a request being submitted on their behalf (article 12).

In 2022 SQA acknowledged feedback from learners that described the current guidance to schools, colleges and training providers defining the types of Exceptional Circumstance that would be considered under EECCS as too vague. Learners raised concerns that the guidance may be open to bias from teachers and lecturers about whether to submit a request for a learner and how significant the circumstance has affected their performance. Following engagement with SQA's learner panel on this, SQA updated the centre guidance in 2023 to ensure this is as clear and concise as possible to support heads of centre to decide whether to submit an EECCS request. This has the potential to address any negative impacts of teacher bias in deciding whether to submit a request on behalf of children and young people.

Evaluation

A full evaluation of the 2023 assessment approach is underway but has not yet concluded. Preliminary results from SQA's survey work confirm the following responses from learners:

◆ Understanding the EECCS process

Of those learners who confirmed that an EECCS request had been submitted on their behalf, 327 responded to this question; 45% agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the EECCS process, while 35% neither agreed nor disagreed. 20% of learners disagreed or strongly disagreed that they understood the EECCS process.

◆ Fairness

Of those learners who submitted an EECCS request, 322 learners responded to this question; 41% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that they thought the EECCS process was fair; 41% neither agreed nor disagreed; and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed that it was fair.

◆ Satisfaction

Of those learners who submitted an EECCS request, 326 learners responded to this question. 40.5% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the EECCS process. 41% neither agreed nor disagreed; and 18.5% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the process.

Overall, it was a small proportion of the learners surveyed that confirmed an EECCS request had been submitted on their behalf. While there are a significant number of learners who neither agreed nor disagreed with the questions they were asked, it is unclear from the evaluation why they selected this response. However, an almost equal proportion of learners of 41% and above agreed or strongly agreed that they understood EECCS, that service was

fair and that they were satisfied with the service. When the evaluation work is complete, all feedback from learners, gathered as part of the Diet 2023 evaluation will be considered by SQA when considering the EECCS model for future diets.

Appeals

Potential impacts on children and young people

The Appeals service provides children and young people with the opportunity to request a review of their SQA-marked assessment components. Children and young people can request a marking review of the materials that were submitted to SQA for marking should they have concerns about their final grade for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher courses. The outcome of an appeal is final and can result in no change to a grade, an upgrade, or a downgrade.

The 2023 Appeals service and EECCS were developed after gathering extensive feedback **on the 2022 services and taking advice from the wider education community. This included** learner, parent / carer, practitioner, school, college, local authority and teacher and lecturer union representatives on the National Qualifications 2023 Group and SQA's Advisory Council. An extensive evaluation of awarding in 2022, including the Appeals service, was carried out with more than 3,500 learners, teachers, lecturers, parents and carers giving their views and reflecting on their experiences in 2022. A number of emerging themes were identified through the evaluation in relation to appeals:

- ◆ There was evidence that the alternative evidence approach led to an increase in the overall amount of assessment for children and young people.
- ◆ The system used led to perceptions of unfairness, as it was not clear to practitioners or learners why evidence submitted to SQA did not lead to an improved grade. Similarly, only children and young people who had received an estimate higher than their certificated grade were eligible to appeal.
- ◆ Stakeholders and participants in the evaluation suggested the previous post-results service could be 'enhanced' to address some of the concerns raised in the past about access, by making it free and giving children and young people direct access. Participants highlighted that the exceptional circumstances service could continue to provide an alternative evidence route for children and young people facing extenuating circumstances who required that option.

In SQA's 2022 National Qualifications Evaluation research project, the majority of children and young people who participated in the survey indicated that they were not satisfied with the Appeals Service in 2022 and felt that it was unfair. The children and young people who responded to SQA's survey and SQA's Learner Panel also fed back that the information in SQA guidance and communications was unclear and that language used needed to be easier to understand and user-friendly. SQA had also received a number of enquiries and complaints from children and young people who were keen to use the Appeals Service in 2022 but believed the service did not meet their needs as there was no opportunity for their exam scripts to be reviewed.

Fairness was also an overarching theme from all audience groups. Children and young people felt that the Appeals Service 2022 was misleading, that there were inconsistencies in how evidence was reviewed between subjects and that greater transparency on how marks

were allocated was needed. Children and young people also fed back in SQA's 2022 National Qualifications Evaluation research project that it was important for them to be able to submit a request directly to SQA without going through their school, college or training provider. Children and young people felt that being able to submit a request directly to SQA would eliminate any potential teacher or lecturer bias.

On 25 January 2023, SQA's Board of Management approved, based on presented evidence, that SQA should adopt a post-result marking review service in 2023, accompanied by an EECCS that provides support for those learners who have suffered exceptional circumstances. The decisions taken were based on the following principles:

- ◆ Fairness to all learners
- ◆ Safe and secure certification of qualifications
- ◆ Maintaining the integrity and credibility of learners' qualifications

After significant consultation with the partner communication group, SQA's post-results service in 2023 was titled 'Appeals 2023' and comprised of a marking review (including a clerical check, where appropriate).

The Appeals service delivered in 2023 was based largely on SQA's 2019 post-results services (PRS), a long-standing service, delivered from 2014 to 2019 which offered a marking review service and a clerical check service. This is a similar service to that which is provided by other Awarding Bodies across the rest of the UK. Additional enhancements were made to this model in 2023, these related to:

- ◆ Learners having the right to request an appeal directly from SQA should they have concerns about their final grade for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher courses.
- ◆ The introduction of a free of charge marking review service, which will include a clerical check where appropriate.

In 2024, the Appeals Service will mirror the approach taken in 2023. The evidence and rationale for moving away from an appeals system that uses alternative evidence, based on perceptions of unfairness, varying standards and over assessment of children and young people to one that takes the form of marking review, as implemented in 2023, remain current and provide the evidence base for the service in 2023–24. This approach also brings SQA into line with the approaches used by other awarding bodies in the rest of the UK. The enhancements made to the Appeals service in 2023 that relate to enabling learner direct access and offering the service free of charge, will remain. These enhancements remove barriers children and young people may have otherwise faced accessing the services. They also eliminate any potential teacher or lecturer bias related to submitting an appeal request.

In 2024, as was the case in 2023, the marking review will be carried out by an experienced marker. Marking reviews are subject to quality assurance to ensure that they are carried out in line with the National standard. The marking review makes sure that:

- ◆ all parts of the externally assessed course components have been marked
- ◆ the marking is in line with the national standard

- ◆ the marks given for each answer have been totalled correctly, where appropriate
- ◆ the correct mark has been entered

The Appeals service is not a re-mark service. The key consideration is whether the marking of each component (and overall) has been carried out to national standards and within agreed tolerances. In providing the Appeals process, SQA is striving to provide reassurances to children and young people who believe an error was made in the initial marking process. SQA want children and young people to receive a qualification and grade which is a fair and accurate reflection of their knowledge, understanding and skills. A key point in the development of the service was that the mechanism must be fair to all children and young people — not just those who access the service. The service should not advantage some children and young people at the expense of others.

Offering the Appeals service addresses the balance between the needs of the system (variable quality and volume of alternative academic evidence submitted by schools, colleges and training providers) and the needs of children and young people undertaking SQA National Qualifications (equity for all learners). As the Appeals service involves a review of coursework and/or exams set by SQA, these will be marked and reviewed against national standards. This reduces the possibility of any potential teacher bias introduced in internal assessments that were submitted for the Appeals 2022 service. By reviewing SQA-set assessments as part of the Appeals service, this ensures fairness for all children and young people as the quality of evidence will not differ across Scotland based on geographical area. The existing robust quality assurance processes in SQA's assessment process, which are also part of the Appeals service, will also reduce any potential bias when marking assessments completed by children and young people.

Grades can go up, go down or stay the same. Downgrades will only happen in circumstances where it has been clearly identified through the marking review process or clerical check that demonstrates clearly that the original certificated grade was made in error. SQA examiners undertake rigorous training to ensure they are clear on the marking process and that these must meet national standards, however errors, albeit minimal, do occur. SQA acknowledged feedback from learners that this will have a negative impact, but it is a difficult decision SQA must make to ensure the integrity of its qualifications.

The Appeals service is designed to complement the EECCS. The EECCS allows for a child or young person's alternative academic evidence to be considered in circumstances where their performance in the examination or ability to attend the examination has been impacted by circumstances that are beyond their control.

A priority appeal can be requested if the child or young person requires a result to secure a conditional place at university, college, employment and/or training. A priority appeal is the same as a standard appeal and will consist of a marking review, including a clerical check, where appropriate. Priority appeals will be considered earlier and the outcome will be released earlier.

Children and young people can directly access SQA's Appeals service if they have a concern about the grade they have been awarded and they have attempted to discuss their concerns with their school, college or training provider but were unable to reach an agreement. By ensuring there is a facility for children and young people to directly access

the Appeals service if their school, college or training provider are not supportive of their intention to do so, SQA acknowledges the rights of the child and provides them with an opportunity to be involved in a service that impacts their education (articles 2, 3, 12, 23, 28 and 29). Children and young people who do not feel comfortable submitting a request directly to SQA will also be able to authorise a representative to do so on their behalf (articles 2, 3, 12 and 23).

Communications

SQA has maintained open communications through its social media channels and by publishing articles on the SQA website. This content is available to all children and young people and relates to developments with National Qualifications. SQA has considered feedback from children and young people about the need for clearer and user-friendly language. SQA will consult with children and young people to ensure any communications and publications issued for the Appeals service are age-appropriate and accessible to disabled children and young people and / or those with additional support needs (articles 2, 12, 17 and 23).

Steps taken by SQA to mitigate impact

Learner Direct

Schools, colleges and training providers are required to support their children and young people to make an informed decision about whether a request should be submitted for the Appeals service. To ensure fairness and equity to all children and young people, particularly for those with a range of protected characteristics, if the child or young person is unable to reach an agreement with their school, college or training provider on whether to submit an appeal request, there will be a facility for them to submit a request directly to SQA for the Appeals service. A provision will also be made for disabled learners and / or those with additional support needs, or those who do not feel confident in doing so independently, to authorise a representative to submit a request on their behalf (articles 2, 3, 12, and 23).

Free of charge

The previous marking review service offered in 2019 (PRS) was a charged service which had the potential to affect children and young people by creating a barrier to access. Although SQA intended for the fee to be met by schools, colleges and training providers, SQA does not have evidence to determine whether this was the case or whether, in some instances, children and young people and their families were charged by the school, college and training provider to meet these costs. SQA acknowledges that to ensure the service is fair and accessible to all children and young people and to allow them to access the service directly, the Appeals service must be free of charge (articles 2, 3, 12).

Evaluation

A full evaluation of the 2023 assessment approach is underway but has not yet concluded. Early results from SQA's survey work confirm the following responses from learners:

- ◆ Understanding the Appeals process

Of those learners who submitted an appeal, 915 learners responded to this question. The majority (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the Appeals process in 2023. 23% of learners disagreed or strongly disagreed that they understood the appeals process.

◆ Fairness

Of those learners who submitted an appeal, 913 responded to this question. 17% agreed or strongly agreed that the Appeals process was fair. 63% of learners disagreed or strongly disagreed that the process was fair.

◆ Satisfaction with the Appeals process

Of those learners who submitted an appeal, 913 responded to this question. 15% agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the Appeals process in 2023. 59% disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were satisfied with the process.

Early analysis has highlighted that a significant number of learners would prefer a return to an Appeals service for National Qualifications that includes the use of alternative academic evidence. Survey comments indicate that learners feel the use of alternative evidence would be fairer as the process takes into consideration their previous work. Some learners who expressed this said that they felt their learning was and continued to be impacted by the pandemic but that this was not taken into account by the 2023 Appeals service. Some learners also indicated that changing the system from year to year put them at a disadvantage and they would prefer a consistent approach.

The evidence and rationale for moving away from an appeals system that uses alternative evidence, based on perceptions of unfairness, varying standards and over assessment of children and young people to one that takes the form of marking review, as implemented in 2023, remain current and provide the evidence base for the service in 2023–24. In providing the same Appeals and EECC services in 2024, SQA is providing stability to the system by ensuring a consistent approach and is using an approach which brings SQA into line with the approach used in other awarding bodies in the rest of the UK. However, these early results from the 2023 evaluation learner’s survey do clearly indicate that a significant number of learners would prefer an approach which makes use of their alternative academic evidence. SQA will consider this learner feedback when the full results of the 2023 evaluation are analysed to determine how it will respond to this in relation to the delivery of the Appeals service for future examination diets.

Taken together, the EECCS and Appeals service in 2024 are designed to work together, to provide all children and young people with the fairest access to assessments. By delivering the same services in 2024 that were provided in 2023, SQA are aiming to provide stability for children and young people. The EECC service has been developed to support children and young people who experience disruption at the time of the exam. This pre-certification service aims to ensure that children and young people impacted by a disruption or exceptional circumstance are still able to receive a grade that reflects their demonstrated attainment. The Appeals service, following issuing of results, provides children and young people a direct route to challenge the grade they received, should they think it was awarded in error. Together, these services support articles 2, 3, 12, 23, 28, 29. These benefits are dependent upon SQA effectively communicating these services to children and young people and centres (Article 17).

This CRWIA demonstrates that reasonable steps have been taken by SQA, within a highly complex set of circumstances, to consider the needs of children and young people across Scotland, along with the requirement to ensure the integrity of national qualifications. SQA will continue to carry out monitoring work to understand and evaluate the impacts of different arrangements on children and young people when determining the approach to these services in the 2024–25 academic year.