

Document 16.1 - The Herald

SQA says that Higher History marking standards did not change

SQA
SQA RESULTS
EDUCATION

By James McEnaneyMrMcEnaneyEducation Reporter



The exam board has released the results of an investigation into exam marking after teachers and markers raised major concerns (*Image: NQ*)

Scotland's only exam board says that a report into Higher History marking has found no problems with this year's approach.

The materials, released at 2pm today by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, state that "the marking standard in 2024 did not change and that the marking and grading processes worked as intended."

The SQA press release says that "learners were not disadvantaged and can be confident that the attainment rate for Higher History accurately reflected their performance."

In August, The Herald revealed that teachers, including current exam marks, had accused the SQA of 'moving the goalposts' and subjecting students to an 'unfair' marking process for this year's Higher History exam.

They insisted that more detailed answers had been demanded than has previously been the case, with the SQA therefore accused of "moving the goalposts" after the exam had taken place.

Critics argued that this decision was behind a 25% drop in pupils' performance levels in the Scottish History part of the exam, and a thirteen percentage point decline in the overall pass rate.

The Herald revealed that the SQA had launched an investigations into the concerns on the 20th of September, but the exam board has now revealed that it had in fact commissioned the review on the 11th of September, two days after we revealed that education secretary Jenny Gilruth had requested a meeting with SQA officials.

According to the SQA release, the investigation was "carried out by SQA's Head of Standards with support and oversight from the Director of Policy, Analysis and Standards." It adds that "independent, external scrutiny of the review" was provided by Richard Harry, Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at Wales' largest awarding body, the WJEC.

The chair of the SQA board said that she hopes the release of the review will "draw a line under the issue".

Fiona Robertson, Scotland's Chief Examiner, said:

"Given the concerns that were raised about Higher History in the weeks after Results Day, it was important to provide reassurance to learners and teachers and to provide confidence in the results and the processes that underpinned them. That's why I commissioned SQA's Head of Standards to undertake a comprehensive, evidence-led review and we asked another awarding body, WJEC, to mark SQA's homework and provide independent assurance that any conclusions reached were evidence-based and valid.

"I acknowledge that the review has taken longer than anticipated but, in the interest of learners, it was important to ensure the review was robust and rigorous. We also had to ensure the external reviewer had sufficient time to analyse, assess and audit the evidence and conclusions. I am very grateful to

Richard Harry for the time he has given to provide external scrutiny of the review.

“There are always lessons for us to learn and this report highlights some areas for wider reflection, which I welcome. In particular, we need to improve how we deal with feedback we receive from markers so that they know that their concerns are being listened to and, where necessary, dealt with. We are committed to giving all learners and educators a stronger voice as we transition into Qualifications Scotland.”

More to follow

Document 16.2 - The Scotsman

'Poor' pupil performance blamed for drop in Higher History pass rate as review comments on 'integrity' of exam

By Calum Ross

Education Correspondent

0Comments

Published 6th Nov 2024, 14:05 GMT

Inquiry was launched following concerns raised by teachers and parents

A review of this year's Higher History has upheld the “integrity” of the exam and blamed the “poor standard” of pupils for a major drop in the pass rate.

Inquiries into the fall revealed that 81 per cent of markers of the Scottish History exam paper reported that the performance of candidates was lower or much lower than in 2023, and 90 per cent said it was lower or much lower than 2019.

The review was carried out by the head of standards at the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), with the findings scrutinised externally by the Welsh exam board.

Concerns were raised after 65.7 per cent of Higher History students attained an A, B or C grade in August this year, a drop of 13.1 percentage points when compared to 2023.

The pass rate had been was 78.7 per cent in 2023, having risen from 72.8 per cent in 2019, before the Covid pandemic.

Last year marked the return of coursework element of qualifications, for the first time since the coronavirus crisis.

From the outset, the SQA said there had been “no change to the approach or standard of the Higher History question papers”, but that there had been a “drop in learners’ performance in the question papers”.

However, following concerns from parents and teachers, and a meeting with Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth in September, the qualifications body announced a review of the way the History papers were marked, which was later expanded to look at the entire course.

The process was expected to take a few days but ended up taking almost two months.

A 51-page report has now concluded that all stages of SQA’s normal processes were followed “rigorously and robustly” and that the Higher History exam team “acted with integrity throughout this process”.

It also said the standard set in the assessments, including a particular paper on Scottish history that was the subject of concerns, was not higher than that for previous years.

However, the review did find that the marking instructions, developed alongside question papers, were “intentionally more detailed than in 2023”, and that teachers were “not aware of the more detailed marking instructions for 2024”.

The report said candidates were not expected to be more specific when answering in order to gain marks than in previous years.

“There is evidence that following the markers’ meeting, some markers were not clear about the standard to be applied in marking QP 2 (question paper 2). There is no evidence that these concerns were raised strongly enough for the principal assessor to judge that further clarification of the marking instructions was required following the meeting,” the review said. It added: “Feedback from markers, who are all teachers, provided in their reports to SQA was overwhelmingly focused on the poor standard of responses provided by learners in this year’s examinations.”

Despite the conclusions, the review found “areas for continuous improvement which could strengthen the way the education community works”.

This includes a consideration of whether there should be fewer options on exam papers for Higher History and potentially of other humanities subjects.

It also urged the SQA to review the way feedback is provided by markers, and how this is considered and used appropriately.

As part of this, the SQA should consider seeking formal, written feedback from markers immediately following every markers’ meeting instead of waiting until the end of the marking period.

The report also found that the SQA should ensure, when making changes to course specifications, that the intended consequences for teaching and learning “are made clear to and clearly understood by teachers”.

The layout and presentation of marking instructions should also be reconsidered “to ensure clarity”.

Martyn Ware, SQA director of policy, analysis and standards, said: “Our review of Higher History has been rigorous and robust with a wide range of evidence gathered and analysed.

“While the concerns raised by teachers and others were focused on the standard of marking, in practice this is just one stage in the process of standard-setting so the review looked at the full range of processes and procedures relating to marking and grading.

“All of these processes and procedures were followed rigorously and the standard set in Higher History was not higher than in previous years.”

Richard Harry, executive director of qualifications and assessment at WJEC, Wales’ largest awarding body, provided external scrutiny of the review.

He said: “I am content that the report’s conclusions are supported sufficiently”.

The SQA has faced a series of controversies in recent years, including over the way it **downgraded thousands of pupil grades** when exams were cancelled in 2020.

Then, in August this year, bosses at the agency were left red-faced when blank exam result emails were **sent out to 7,500 learners**.

The SQA is due to be **replaced by Qualifications Scotland next year**.

Document 17.1 - TESS

Higher history review finds marking standard did not change

SQA internal investigation states the sharp drop in Higher history passes was down to 'the poor standard of responses' from students, especially on the Scottish history paper

6th November 2024, 3:59pm

Emma Seith



The delayed **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) review** of the sharp drop this year in the Higher history pass rate has found that the standard was “not higher than that set in previous years”.

It also states that processes were “followed rigorously and robustly”, and the “Higher history exam team acted with integrity”.

The review - originally expected in late September - points the finger of blame at a weaker student cohort sitting the Higher history exam in 2023-24, saying feedback from markers provided in their reports “was overwhelmingly focused on the poor standard of responses provided by learners, especially for the Scottish history question paper”.

The report says: “The strongest theme in the feedback from markers was the poorer performance of learners; 81 per cent felt that the performance in Scottish history was lower or much lower than in 2023.”

The figure is based on 69 marker reports submitted at the end of the marking period. A total of 90 per cent felt that the performance standard in Scottish history was lower or much lower than in 2019.

One marker commented: “The paper was not particularly hard but the standard of candidate seems to have dropped.”

However, SQA markers also flagged concerns about marking instructions and standards this year.

They said the marking standard was “harsh” and “it felt like the goalposts were moved after the exam”. They also said that while “overall performance was lower this year”, that “could be because the standard appeared to be much stricter”.

Explanation given for delay to review

The review - which reveals a big surge in Higher history appeals, up almost 70 per cent - took longer to carry out than initially projected, because it went beyond looking just at the marking of assessments.

“In the interests of transparency”, it looked at “the full end-to-end process...from question paper and marking instruction development, through marking and post-exam procedures, to grade-boundary decisions and appeals”.

The review, by the SQA’s head of standards, malpractice and complaints, Margot McKerrell, was started after a sharp drop in Higher history pass rates emerged when annual results data was published in August.

The concerns about Higher history - initially highlighted by *Tes Scotland* on 13 August, were raised after just 65.7 per cent of students this year attained an A-C grade, a drop of 13.1 percentage points compared with 2023.

At the time, the SQA said there was “no change to the approach or standard of the Higher history question papers”, but that there was “a drop in learners’ performance in the question papers”.

However, SQA markers and teachers disputed this and the plans for a review were made public on Friday 20 September. Concerns centred on paper two, which focuses on Scottish history. They said there were changes made to the marking standards in 2024, with students required to give more detail than in previous years in order to gain full marks.

The review acknowledges that there was “mixed feedback on the marking instructions” for Higher history and the marking instructions included more points of detail and exemplification in 2024 than in previous years.

But it says that happens “each year to exemplify the standard and support markers”, and the random sampling of markers’ papers means any markers who grade too harshly or leniently have their papers remarked. It says no remarks were carried out in 2024.

The review also states: “An analysis of a random, representative sample of learners’ answers shows that learners did not have to be more specific to gain marks in 2024.”

On average, students sitting paper two in 2024 picked up fewer than half the available marks (15.2 points out of 36). Last year, on average, students got 57.2 per cent for paper two (20.6 points out of 36).

Dissatisfaction reflected in scale of appeals

Dissatisfaction with this year’s Higher history grades is reflected in the number of appeals SQA has received.

The report shows a 68 per cent rise in appeals, from 974 for Higher history last year, but 1,638 in the wake of this year’s exam.

However, the report says that “while there was a larger number of Higher history appeals in 2024 than in 2023, a smaller percentage was successful”.

Last year, 24 per cent of standard Higher history appeals were upgraded. In 2024 that figure fell to 14 per cent.

The review - which was independently scrutinised by Wales’s largest awarding body, the WJEC - identifies four areas for “continuous improvement”, including:

- Reviewing the way marker feedback is considered and used, and how markers are informed about actions taken to address any concerns raised.
- Seeking feedback immediately after markers’ meetings rather than at the end of the marking period.
- Ensuring that changes to course specifications, and the intended consequences, are clearly understood by teachers.
- Building a stronger understanding across the education community of the end-to-end operation of the exams system.

Martyn Ware, SQA director of policy, analysis and standards, said the review had been “rigorous and robust, with a wide range of evidence gathered and analysed” and “the standard set in Higher history was not higher than in previous years”.

Richard Harry, who carried out the independent scrutiny of the report on behalf of WJEC, said: “I am content that the report’s conclusions are supported sufficiently.”

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Emma Seith

Document 17.2 The Herald

UPDATED

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By [James McEnaney](#)MrMcEnaneyEducation Reporter



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The chair of the SQA board said that she hopes the release of the review will “draw a line under the issue”.

Fiona Robertson, Scotland’s Chief Examiner, said:

“Given the concerns that were raised about Higher History in the weeks after Results Day, it was important to provide reassurance to learners and teachers and to provide confidence in the results and the processes that underpinned them. That’s why I commissioned SQA’s Head of Standards to undertake a comprehensive, evidence-led review and we asked another awarding body, WJEC, to mark SQA’s homework and provide independent assurance that any conclusions reached were evidence-based and valid.

“I acknowledge that the review has taken longer than anticipated but, in the interest of learners, it was important to ensure the review was robust and rigorous. We also had to ensure the external reviewer had sufficient time to analyse, assess and audit the evidence and conclusions. I am very grateful to Richard Harry for the time he has given to provide external scrutiny of the review.

“There are always lessons for us to learn and this report highlights some areas for wider reflection, which I welcome. In particular, we need to improve how we deal with feedback we receive from markers so that they know that their concerns are being listened to and, where necessary, dealt with. We are committed to giving all learners and educators a stronger voice as we transition into Qualifications Scotland.”

However, speaking to The Herald on condition of anonymity, current History teachers – including some who marked exams in 2024 – were scathing about the SQA report, offering comments including:

- “It is a disgrace that they are saying there was no change and no problem!”
- “Absolutely no way!! I know for a fact that markers were writing in their reports that they were surprised by the standard and would have to adjust their teaching.”
- “Like Trump’s victory, even though the history report is as expected, it’s still a gut punch. It makes liars out of all the teachers who were in that room, which is such an unpleasant aftertaste. It makes it hard to move forward. The report gives no redress.”
- “Can't say I'm shocked. Teachers are ultimately too busy to put up a fuss and the whole thing will be memory holed by schools and staff who can't afford to dwell on it. As always it's the pupils that ultimately suffer.”
- “It's there in black and white that the MI changed from the year prior. What hope is there if SQA team leaders said it had changed and they aren't believed. Now every teacher of history from N4-AH will be second guessing every bit of advice they give. Maybe the SQA will re-brand their advertising for markers from ‘get the inside track’ to ‘get the inside track (which might also be incorrect)’.”

- “Confused and demoralised sums it up. I no longer have any confidence in H History as a course and as a Faculty Head will need to look in future at coursing our young people away from History into Mods/Geog/Politics so they have a chance of getting the grades they need for uni. Really sad. Those in charge of assessment have effectively destroyed the subject. It was already bad enough with the issues with essay structure for paper 1, the issues with paper 2 now are a death knell for the course.”
- “What an absolute farce. They always knew they would find no fault with themselves, what was the point?”

One teacher contacted The Herald to point out that an acknowledgement of the “change of standard” had been “buried in the report”.

In a section containing “representative marker comments”, several teachers express concerns including “the marking standard was much higher than in previous years” and argued that requiring students to use “a name to get a mark” was “not the same as previous years”.

However, the report suggests that markers may not fully understand the processes involved in grading exam papers, and says that the principal assessor and senior exam team have “wider knowledge.” It also says that the principal assessor – about whom teachers have raised concerns – “felt that the markers’ meeting had run as expected”.

SNP MSP Fergus Ewing, who had previously called for government action over the issue, was also sceptical:

“Given the angry and sceptical reaction from the teachers themselves, this report seems to be more of an exercise in self-justification by the SQA than an honest attempt to answer legitimate and serious questions, from children teachers and parents.

“Some children may not get the place in a university courses they sought, as a result of poorer than expected history performance. Surely that’s a serious matter? But not one that seems to concern the SQA.

“If the marks of children were as SQA state so much lower last year , then why was that? Nowhere in the SQA report can I see any explanation offered by them.

“In Scotland the quango is now in charge, and rarely if ever called to book. Their homework always remains unmarked , and errors uncorrected by the red ink of the Ministerial pen.”

Scottish Labour Education spokesperson Pam Duncan-Glancy said “Once again the SQA has shown how disconnected it is from what is happening in our schools.

“After marking its own homework, the SQA has decided to try and blame pupils and teachers for what went wrong here.

“The SNP must take responsibility for the chaos surrounding the SQA and step in to get answers on what happened with this history paper.

“This is a clear reminder that a rebranding exercise is not enough to fix the systemic issues in our education system – the SNP must deliver the change needed before another generation of school children are let down.”

The SQA has been asked to confirm some details of the review, including the number of classroom teachers and exam markers that were interviewed as part of the process, but has not yet responded.

More to follow

Document 18.1 – The Scotsman p12

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Scotsman

Date: 07/11/2024

Page: 12

Reach: 14938

Value: 2484.7200

SQA backs the integrity of its History exam and denies paper was too difficult

Calum Ross

Education Correspondent

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The pass rate at A,B,C level fell by 13 percentage points

Document 18.2 – The Herald p1 and 2

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Herald

Date: 07/11/2024

Page: 1
Reach: 22901
Value: 2263.3600

Higher History marking 'worked as intended'

James McEnaney

Education

Correspondent

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The Scottish

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Continued on Page 2

SQA is accused of 'whitewash'

Continued from Page 1

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had sufficient time to analyse, assess, and audit the evidence and conclusions.

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we receive from markers so that they know that their concerns are being listened to and, where necessary, dealt with. We are committed to giving all learners and educators a stronger voice as we transition into Qualifications Scotland."

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"It makes liars out of all the teachers who were in that room, which is such an unpleasant aftertaste. It makes it hard to move forward. The report gives no redress."

"Can' t say I' m shocked. Teachers are ultimately too busy to put up a fuss and the whole thing will be memory holed by schools and staff who can' t afford to dwell on it. As always it' s the pupils that ultimately suffer."

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Document 19.1 – Extract from First Minister's Questions

EXTRACT FROM FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

ON THE REVIEW OF HIGHER HISTORY ATTAINMENT

FOR: THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY **

PROG: FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTIONS SERVICE: BBC 1 SCOTLAND

DATE: 7.11.24 TIME: 1243 DURATION: 1 MIN 35 SECS SERIAL: 110755

PRESIDING OFFICER

Pam Duncan-Glancy.

PAM DUNCAN-GLANCY MSP, Scottish Labour

Thank you, Presiding Officer. Yesterday, the SQA published its review into the collapse in Higher History attainment, saying that poor standard of learner performance accounts for the drop. So, after essentially marking their own homework, the SQA has said there was no problem, despite teachers and pupils saying otherwise. One teacher has said of this review, 'it's a gut punch, it makes liars out of all the teachers who were in that room'. The First Minister presided over an exams fiasco in 2020, that punished the poorest pupils, and here we have another one. So, can I ask the First Minister, how many more exams fiascos is he happy to oversee before he accepts that his government's so-called reforms are nothing more than a rebrand?

PRESIDING OFFICER

First Minister.

JOHN SWINNEY MSP, First Minister

On the question of Higher History, the review was published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the report was independently reviewed and endorsed by the director of qualifications and assessment at the WJEC, which is the largest awarding body in Wales, so there's been no example of anybody marking their own homework, it's been independently reviewed and obviously, this is a matter of distress, I understand the concerns there are about performance of young people when they don't get the qualifications that they hoped to achieve but what has been undertaken here is a thorough and an independent review of the concerns and they've been peer reviewed by another awarding body.

Document 19.2 – The Herald

Herald online

Wednesday 6 November 2024 – further updated on Thursday 7 November 2024

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- “Like Trump’s victory, even though the history report is as expected, it’s still a gut punch. It makes liars out of all the teachers who were in that room, which is such an unpleasant aftertaste. It makes it hard to move forward. The report gives no redress.”
- “Can’t say I’m shocked. Teachers are ultimately too busy to put up a fuss and the whole thing will be memory holed by schools and staff who can’t afford to dwell on it. As always it’s the pupils that ultimately suffer.”
- “It’s there in black and white that the MI changed from the year prior. What hope is there if SQA team leaders said it had changed and they aren’t believed. Now every teacher of history from N4-AH will be second guessing every bit of advice they give. Maybe the SQA will re-brand their advertising for markers from ‘get the inside track’ to ‘get the inside track (which might also be incorrect)’.”
- “Confused and demoralised sums it up. I no longer have any confidence in H History as a course and as a Faculty Head will need to look in future at coursing our young people away from History into Mods/Geog/Politics so they have a chance of getting the grades they need for uni. Really sad. Those in charge of assessment have effectively destroyed the subject. It was already bad enough with the issues with essay structure for paper 1, the issues with paper 2 now are a death knell for the course.”
- “What an absolute farce. They always knew they would find no fault with themselves, what was the point?”

One teacher contacted The Herald to point out that an acknowledgement of the “change of standard” had been “buried in the report”.

In a section containing “representative marker comments”, several teachers express concerns including “the marking standard was much higher than in previous years” and argued that requiring students to use “a name to get a mark” was “not the same as previous years”.

However, the report suggests that markers may not fully understand the processes involved in grading exam papers, and says that the principal assessor and senior exam team have “wider knowledge.” It also says that the principal assessor – about whom teachers have raised concerns – “felt that the markers’ meeting had run as expected”.

SNP MSP Fergus Ewing, who had previously called for government action over the issue, was also sceptical: “Given the angry and sceptical reaction from the teachers themselves, this

report seems to be more of an exercise in self-justification by the SQA than an honest attempt to answer legitimate and serious questions, from children teachers and parents.

“Some children may not get the place in a university courses they sought, as a result of poorer than expected history performance. Surely that’s a serious matter? But not one that seems to concern the SQA.

“If the marks of children were as SQA state so much lower last year , then why was that? Nowhere in the SQA report can I see any explanation offered by them.

“In Scotland the quango is now in charge, and rarely if ever called to book. Their homework always remains unmarked , and errors uncorrected by the red ink of the Ministerial pen.”

Scottish Labour Education spokesperson Pam Duncan-Glancy said “Once again the SQA has shown how disconnected it is from what is happening in our schools.

“After marking its own homework, the SQA has decided to try and blame pupils and teachers for what went wrong here.

“The SNP must take responsibility for the chaos surrounding the SQA and step in to get answers on what happened with this history paper.

“This is a clear reminder that a rebranding exercise is not enough to fix the systemic issues in our education system – the SNP must deliver the change needed before another generation of school children are let down.”

Scottish Conservative shadow education secretary Miles Briggs said: “This ‘nothing to see here’ response from the SQA will do little to satisfy pupils, parents and teachers who have grave concerns over this year’s Higher History exam.

“This apparent whitewash will do little to assuage suspicions that the SQA is marking its own homework and underlines the need for proper reform of this discredited quango, rather than just a superficial name change.”

The SQA was asked to confirm some details of the review, including the number of classroom teachers and exam markers that were interviewed as part of the process.

Their spokesperson said:

“Markers are all teachers and are asked to provide feedback after marking is complete. Over 150 Higher History markers submitted feedback and all of this feedback was considered by the review. In addition, when concerns were first raised about the marking standard, we wrote to every Higher History marker and gave them a further opportunity to provide feedback. While only four took up this further opportunity, this feedback was also considered by the review.

“As the concerns raised were focused on the setting of the standard, follow-up interviews were conducted with those responsible for setting this standard, namely the senior appointees - also teachers - and SQA staff.

“The review provides a balanced summary of the feedback provided by markers, who are all teachers.

“Independent, external scrutiny of the review by an expert in standard-setting and exams has endorsed the findings and confirmed the evidence supports the report’s conclusions.”

Document 20.1 – First Minister's Questions

EXTRACT FROM FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTIONS

ON THE REVIEW OF HIGHER HISTORY ATTAINMENT

FOR: THE SCOTTISH QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY **
PROG: FIRST MINISTER'S QUESTIONS SERVICE: BBC 1 SCOTLAND
DATE: 7.11.24 TIME: 1243 DURATION: 1 MIN 35 SECS SERIAL: 110755

PRESIDING OFFICER

Pam Duncan-Glancy.

PAM DUNCAN-GLANCY MSP, Scottish Labour

Thank you, Presiding Officer. Yesterday, the SQA published its review into the collapse in Higher History attainment, saying that poor standard of learner performance accounts for the drop. So, after essentially marking their own homework, the SQA has said there was no problem, despite teachers and pupils saying otherwise. One teacher has said of this review, 'it's a gut punch, it makes liars out of all the teachers who were in that room'. The First Minister presided over an exams fiasco in 2020, that punished the poorest pupils, and here we have another one. So, can I ask the First Minister, how many more exams fiascos is he happy to oversee before he accepts that his government's so-called reforms are nothing more than a rebrand?

PRESIDING OFFICER

First Minister.

JOHN SWINNEY MSP, First Minister

On the question of Higher History, the review was published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, the report was independently

reviewed and endorsed by the director of qualifications and assessment at the WJEC, which is the largest awarding body in Wales, so there's been no example of anybody marking their own homework, it's been independently reviewed and obviously, this is a matter of distress, I understand the concerns there are about performance of young people when they don't get the qualifications that they hoped to achieve but what has been undertaken here is a thorough and an independent review of the concerns and they've been peer reviewed by another awarding body.

Document 20.2 – The Herald (letters page 16)

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage
Source: The Herald
Date: 08/11/2024
Page: 16
Reach: 22901
Value: 2758.4700

LETTERS

It's good to see schools stand up to the SQA. Now it's time to make exams history

ON reading your article on the latest soap episode on the SQA ("Higher History marking 'worked as intended' " , The Herald, November 7), I doubt if anyone really imagined that it would wave a white flag, especially as its days are numbered as an authority. The issue is in fact one which has probably been constant over the years of its existence, though it is good to see schools standing up for themselves at last. The problem always seems that schools teach with the naked eye and then their students are externally assessed with a microscope. I suggest that apart from the

seeming failure of the SQA to provide sufficient exemplification beforehand on the standards expected that year, the issue is much wider. I expect that the SQA can make any standard it pleases for Higher so long as universities accept that standard. However, they do seem to differentiate between an A pass and a B pass as if the consequences would affect the orbit of the Moon.

If we must insist on exams is it not time for a broader brush approach with just a pass mark and if the universities don't like it they can make their own arrangements? After all, the exam diet is so intense that young people are not only branded but can be defined as an adult.

Bill Brown,
Milngavie.

Q

1



Is it time to
rethink the
exams system?

Document 20.3 – The Press Association

Subject: 071124 Press Association: Nearly one in three pupils in England given extra time in exams, says regulator

EDUCATION Exams

Nearly one in three pupils in England given extra time in exams, says regulator

By Eleanor Busby, PA Education Correspondent

16:48 - 7 Nov 2024

Notes: (adds further copy in pars nine and 10, and final two pars)

Nearly a third of pupils in England were given 25% extra time to complete their GCSEs and A-level exams following a surge in special exam access arrangements being granted, data from Ofqual has shown.

The figure is higher again among exam candidates in private schools where more than two in five received 25% extra time in the last academic year, according to England's exams regulator.

The total number of approved special access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A-level exams rose by 12.3% in the 2023/24 school year compared to the year before, the data has revealed.

It comes as education leaders have suggested more pupils are seeking support after the pandemic due to a rise in young people with special educational needs and disabilities (Send) and mental health issues.

Requests for 25% extra time in exams was the most common approved access arrangement for pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities, followed by computer readers, scribes and speech recognition.

More than three in 10 (30.1%) candidates taking exams in England were granted 25% extra time in 2023/24, compared with 28.0% in 2022/23, the latest data from Ofqual has revealed.

Independent centres – of which the majority are private schools – 41.8% of all candidates were granted 25% extra time in their exams in 2023/24, compared to 35% in sixth form and FE colleges and 26.5% in non-selective state schools.

²

Overall, there were 624,975 approved access arrangements for GCSE, AS and A-level exams in England in 2023/24, compared to 556,435 in 2022/23 and 512,085 in 2021/22.

Ofqual said an individual candidate can be granted more than one type of access arrangement.

It added that once granted, an access arrangement for a long-term condition is valid for up to 26 months, so these approved requests could contribute to the overall figure on the number of access arrangements over multiple years.

Summer exams did not take place in 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and results were instead based on teacher assessments.

Exams returned in 2022 and grading was restored to pre-pandemic levels in England in 2023.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary at school leaders' union NAHT, said: "Our members have definitely seen a rise in the requests for access arrangements, particularly for students to take their exams away from main exam halls in smaller rooms.

"That rise in requests is likely to be a result of a variety of factors including the

impact of the pandemic and increasing anxiety and mental health issues.

“Those may be exacerbated by the number of high stakes final exams students face in their GCSE subjects.

“There is also more awareness amongst students and parents of what is available to help students cope with exams and get the support that they need.”

Mr Whiteman called for more support for schools and colleges to meet the increasing demand for separate or small room invigilation as he added that finding staff and space can be “challenging”.

Pepe Di’lasio, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), said: “It isn’t surprising that access arrangements for examinations are on the increase because so are the number of students with special educational needs and poor mental health.

³

“At least some of the well-being issues are directly linked to the exam system itself where the sheer quantity of assessment in a short period of time is excessive and the stakes are too high.”

David Holloway, senior policy manager Send at the Association of Colleges (AoC), said the rise in students presenting with Send and mental health conditions may have led to more adjustments.

He added that the rise in approved exam access arrangements had posed challenges for colleges due to “substantial extra pressure” on accommodation and staffing.

Mr Holloway said: “For colleges, the increase is also down to the proportion of students who need to resit their GCSE English and maths exams.

“Numbers of resits have been rising and in some colleges, more than half of GCSE English resit students require EAs (exam access arrangements), such as extra time, a separate room or adaptations to the printed exam paper.”

A Department for Education (DfE) spokesperson said: “We are committed to high and rising standards and it’s crucial that students with disabilities, learning difficulties or temporary illness be provided with access arrangements.

“This ensures they are not unfairly disadvantaged when taking their exams compared to their peers and that all pupils get the best life chances.

“All schools, including independent schools, are required to apply for access arrangements on behalf of their students and provide evidence to awarding organisations to support their application.

“We are committed to identifying what is driving this gap and whether there are systemic barriers in place preventing state schools from accessing these arrangements, as part of wider work on Send identification in schools.”

A spokesperson for Ofqual said: “There are many factors that could contribute to the overall rise in access arrangements and there are many reasons why schools and colleges apply for them.

“It is important that students receive the access arrangements they need to allow them to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do.”

Document 20.4 – TESS Online

TESS online

Thursday 7 November 2024

‘Degradation’ of music education ‘sets a dangerous precedent’

Fears mount over future of instrumental tuition in Scotland after a move that puts music education for younger pupils ‘at risk’

A Scottish council’s decision to move its instrumental music services to an arm’s-length body marks a “dangerous precedent”, MSPs heard today.

Last week, despite widespread criticism, East Ayrshire Council voted to transfer its instrumental music services to the East Ayrshire Leisure Trust.

Today, Conservative MSP Brian Whittle raised concerns that this “cost-saving measure” drew “a distinction between music tuition for Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) qualifications and tuition for younger pupils or extracurricular activity”.

He argued that a two-tier approach to education had been created, where SQA music courses in the senior phase of secondary school were more important than other forms of tuition.

Mr Whittle said: “I am concerned that the degradation of music education sets a dangerous precedent, which puts access to music education for younger pupils at risk.”

In 2021, the Scottish government committed to abolishing fees for instrumental music tuition in schools, alongside other measures designed to enhance the status of music. Since then, there has been a big rise in numbers taking music lessons, but there are fears that such progress will be reversed by decisions like that in East Ayrshire.

In response to Mr Whittle, higher and further education minister Graeme Dey told the Scottish Parliament that it was “for individual councils to make decisions about their own provision, albeit in a context in which music education is a core part of the curriculum and there is equity of access to instrumental music tuition”.

Move ‘designed to protect music’

He explained that East Ayrshire Council had given the Scottish government officials “assurances that it is not its intention to reintroduce charging and that the move is, in fact, designed to protect the service from potential cuts to education”.

Mr Dey added: “I understand that the council has indicated that pupils will continue to have music under the school curriculum, and it has insisted that there are no plans to introduce a two-tier tuition model that separates SQA tuition from non-SQA tuition.”

After East Ayrshire Council took its decision last week, EIS teaching union assistant secretary Anne Keenan said: “This is a terrible decision by East Ayrshire Council, which will significantly downgrade the status of instrumental music teaching in East Ayrshire’s schools, undermining key Scottish government manifesto commitments and diluting the educational focus of this key service.”

Ms Keenan added: “It is not too late for East Ayrshire Council to stop this reckless course of action and recommit to delivering the best possible instrumental music education for young people.”

Henry Hepburn

Document 20.5 – The Times

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Times (Scotland)

Date: 08/11/2024

Page: 18

Reach: 28123

Value: 9966.9600

Bias training ‘could invite pupils to spy on teachers’

Mark McLaughlin

Teachers face training to weed out bias against ethnic minorities, disabled pupils and boys under SNP plans to replace exams with classroom assessments, hidden documents reveal.

The Scottish government is also under pressure to train children about biased marking so they can confront their teachers, and to use artificial intelligence to second-guess their teachers’ judgment.

Jenny Gilruth, the education secretary, recently announced plans to “rebalance” school assessments with fewer exams and more continuous teacher assessment.

There are concerns that some otherwise competent pupils do badly in high-stakes final-year exams.

However, studies have found that teachers demonstrate bias against boys, disabled pupils and ethnic minorities when asked to mark papers from children they know.

Teachers routinely submit estimates to the Scottish Qualifications Authority on how they think pupils will fare in exams to assist in appeals from pupils who do not achieve their expected grades. In 2020, the authority published a study that found ethnic minorities were disproportionately underestimated by teachers.

The Scottish government acknowledged the risk of teacher bias in impact assessments that accompanied the policy announcement in September.

These included a “Fairer Scotland Duty” assessment, which measured the risk of discrimination, and a child rights assessment, which proposed mandatory unconscious bias training for teachers. The child rights assessment was pulled from the Scottish government website within 24 hours.

Other documents refer to the assessment but the web links are broken.

The Times obtained the document, which confirmed plans to explore unconscious bias training for teachers.

The “fairer Scotland duty” assessment includes further suggestions from interested groups on how to weed out bias from classroom assessments.

It states: “Pupils should learn about teacher bias, so that they can advocate for themselves in a more powerful way.

Moderation and AI marking could be useful means of addressing teacher bias.”

Lindsay Paterson, professor emeritus of education policy at the University of Edinburgh, said unconscious bias training was highly controversial and unlikely to be effective. “It may, in fact, be counterproductive, confirming biases rather than ending them,” he said.

“The idea that pupils would police teachers’ biases is alarming, because, on the whole, children would not have the objective knowledge and maturity to evaluate this. Allowing children to do this would be akin to inviting them to spy on their teachers, which would be a very controversial matter.”

He added: “Any move away from [invigilated exams] would be likely to increase social inequalities.”

The Scottish government confirmed that the child rights assessment was pulled from the website and was “currently being updated” to align with the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, which was incorporated into Scots law in January.



Jenny Gilruth, the SNP education secretary. A government policy paper says pupils should learn about teacher bias

Document 20.6 – TESS Online

TESS online

Thursday 7 November 2024

Isolation and loneliness akin to pandemic, warns education leader

The digital world's effect on social contact has 'huge' ramifications for educators, says ADES president

The president of the Scottish education directors' body ADES today warned that "social isolation and loneliness are going to be the next pandemic".

This was no longer an issue mostly affecting older people, Sheena Devlin told delegates at the ADES annual conference in Cumbernauld.

"We see young people who are socially isolated because of digitisation and living in a digital world, and so there is a huge piece of work for us to continue to do," she said.

Echoing findings from the Scottish government's International Council of Education Advisers, Ms Devlin stressed the "primacy" of in-person education.

She also suggested that the situation might improve in the future as the focus in society shifted from "digital by default or digital first" to "rehumanisation" and "humans with digital".

The theme of this year's ADES conference, which also takes place tomorrow, is "Towards a world-class learning system".

Education directors were working in a "complex landscape", said Ms Devlin, who is also director of education and children's services at Perth and Kinross Council.

In 2023, the outgoing ADES president Douglas Hutchison, Glasgow City Council's director of education, had spoken of difficulties around budgets, reform and multiple big reports about Scottish education. Ms Devlin said that complexity was unlikely to dissipate and "at best" things would remain "as complex as they are".

She urged council education leaders to remain focused on what was important and advised them not to get "embroiled" in "urgent and immediate" matters while losing sight of the big picture in education.

This resonated with Laurence Findlay - the ADES vice-president and director of education and children's services in Aberdeenshire Council - who said he had spent much of the previous day discussing "budget and budget and budget", with little time left to focus on other matters.

In Glasgow, meanwhile, teacher numbers - the government's edict that they should be maintained, and the council's plans to cut them - have been dominating education in the city for most of 2024.

Today, more headlines will be generated after a legal challenge from a parents' group focused on the cuts was refused permission to proceed by a Court of Session judge.

The council said the court's decision to refuse permission for the challenge to proceed was made "on the basis that it had no prospects of success".

Education directors also concerned by assessment reform

On qualifications and assessment reform, Ms Devlin said today that there was "little detail".

Headteachers felt like they were "in a bit of a holding position", she said, referencing her own observation at the ADES annual conference last year when she said education directors felt like they were "in limbo".

"It was interesting for me to hear a year on from the headteachers that that was how they feel," she said.

She suggested there was sometimes an attempt to couple together systems from different eras "because we're so scared to let go".

She questioned if something built in the 19th century could respond to the needs and expectations of 21st-century users.

There was a reluctance to "throw the baby out with the bathwater", she said, but there might at times be a case for "more of a clean-sheet approach".

Emma Seith

Document 21.1 The Herald

Herald online

Wednesday 13 November 2024

Swinney may have misled parliament over SQA review of exam marking

John Swinney may have misled MSPs over an investigation into alleged marking problems with the 2024 Higher History exam.

The First Minister claimed that SQA's work had been "thorough and independent" and that a report on the issue had been "peer reviewed". However, the body asked to provide an independent review of the investigation has declined to publicly support the methodology used by the Scottish exam board.

Critics now say that the Mr Swinney has “questions to answer” and “must come clean” with MSPs.

The SQA was forced to launch the review after teachers, including current markers, reported that the standard for Higher History had been altered after the exam had taken place. They accused the exam board, and specifically those in charge of History marking, of “moving the goalposts” and subjecting students to an “unfair” process.

Critics argued that this change was behind a 25% drop in pupils’ performance levels in the Scottish History part of the exam, and a 13% decline in the overall pass rate.

The review, which was carried out by an SQA official, was eventually published on November 6 – more than a month late. It found that the exam board had acted properly and blamed pupils for the drastic drop in attainment rates and performance levels.

However, The Herald quickly revealed that the only people interviewed as part of the investigation had close links to the SQA and were the people whose work was being reviewed. This led to fresh accusations that the exam board was being allowed to ‘mark its own homework’.

During last week’s First Minister’s Question session in the Scottish Parliament, Mr Swinney was challenged on the report by Labour’s Pam Duncan-Glancy MSP, who cited The Herald’s reporting on the matter.

In response, Mr Swinney backed the SQA, stating that a “a thorough and independent review” had been carried out. He then added that the report had been “peer reviewed” by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

However, when asked about the approach taken during the investigation, including the decision to only interview those with links to Scotland’s exam board, a WJEC spokesperson refused to comment.

Instead, they advised that their role had only been to ensure that the evidence provided in the report matched the conclusions presented. Questions about the way in which that evidence had been gathered were referred back to the SQA.

Scottish Labour education spokesperson Pam Duncan-Glancy said that Mr Swinney has “questions to answer”. She also referenced the 2020 exam algorithm scandal and warned that the First Minister risks presiding over another “exams fiasco”.

Ms Duncan-Glancy said: “This debacle lays bare all of the failings of the SNP’s qualifications body – they are disconnected from the classroom and are happy to protect their own instead of protecting Scotland’s education system.

“Last week the First Minister said the review was scrutinised, but this latest revelation leaves him with questions to answer.

“The First Minister has already presided over an exams fiasco and it is looking increasingly likely that he’s going to preside over another.

“Once again young people have been left paying the price for SNP incompetence.”

Scottish Conservatives education spokesperson Miles Briggs, who previously described the report as a 'whitewash', insisted that the First Minister must "come clean on his knowledge of the situation engulfing the SQA".

He added: "Other authorities clearly believe that the SQA has marked its own homework and has avoided the thorough investigation that should have taken place.

"As a former education secretary, John Swinney must be upfront about what evidence there is to support what he said in Parliament. Otherwise, suspicions will only continue to grow about this SNP quango, which is not fit for purpose."

A spokesperson for the Scottish Parliament said: "Members are responsible for the content of their contributions during Parliamentary proceedings. The Parliament's Members' corrections guidance sets out the process around correcting information during proceedings or through corrections added to the Official Report, including how to seek corrections from another member and publicising where a correction has been added."

An SQA spokesperson said: "The Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at WJEC, an expert in standard setting in the context of national examinations, provided independent, external scrutiny and challenge of the review, including the evidence, conclusions and wider reflections. We provided Mr Harry [Richard Harry WJEC executive director of qualifications and assessment] with whatever additional information he asked for to be able to undertake his work and he has publicly acknowledged the review team's candour and openness to challenge through this process."

The Scottish Government were approached for comment.

James McEnaney

Document 21.2 – The Herald (pages 1 and 4)

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Herald

Date: 13/11/2024

Page: 1

Reach: 22901

Value: 3896.5800

Exclusive

James McEnaney

Education Correspondent

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Continued on Page 4

John Swinney is quizzed at FMQs

1

Swinney accused of misleading parliament over Higher History exam fiasco

From Page 1

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The Scottish Government was approached for comment.

Document 21.3 – TESS Online

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: Times Education Supplement (Web)

Date: 12/11/2024

Page: 0

Reach: 340750

Value: 9146.0000

Timeline for new Centre of Teaching Excellence revealed

Scottish government officials say a number of universities are 'very interested' in hosting the new centre, which has been described by school

leaders as 'unnecessary' and 'costly' The Scottish government will announce the host university for the proposed Centre of Teaching Excellence

"by the end of this year".

And the centre should be "up and running" from the spring, Tes Scotland can reveal.

Clare Hicks, the government's director of education reform, set out the timeline for the introduction of the new centre in an address to at its

annual conference in Cumbernauld last week.

Ms Hicks said the government had received applications to host the centre – which is expected to have a budget of around £4 million a year –

from "a number of very interested universities", and that a shortlist had been drawn up.

Background:

Related:

Long read:

The was announced by education secretary Jenny Gilruth at the SNP annual conference in October 2023.

She said it would make Scotland "a world leader in new approaches to learning and teaching" and ensure that all teachers are "supported and empowered" in the classroom.

In the wake of the announcement, Ms Gilruth was criticised over her failure to consult.

The EIS teaching union said the new centre might "offer additional and welcome advice and support on pedagogy" but also warned that it would

not address other key issues impacting on excellent learning and teaching, including "rampant and increasing poverty" or "the chronic underresourcing of ASN provision".

Scottish education's 'tarnished word'

other bodies, meanwhile, have raised concerns about the title of the "university-boosted institute" – as Ms Hicks described it – and, in particular, , with school leaders saying that in the wake of the difficulties around Curriculum for Excellence, this had become a "tarnished word" in Scottish education.

Secondary heads' body School Leaders Scotland (SLS) suggested "a more aspirational but reachable goal rather than excellence".

More recently SLS has questioned how the new centre will fit into the government's , with general secretary Graham Hutton describing it as "a costly innovation, which quite simply isn't needed".

He told Tes Scotland in October that Education Scotland had "proven over the years that they are able to provide high-quality professional

learning and support" and that "adding another organisation into the mix seems unnecessary".

Speaking at the ADES conference last Thursday, Ms Hicks said that Education Scotland would continue to have "that strategic role in terms of professional learning and supporting curriculum improvement".

The role of the Centre of Teaching Excellence, she said, would be to provide "added value in terms of supporting quality learning and teaching".

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Emma Seith

[sourcelink]<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/general/when-will-the-scottish-centre-of-teaching-excellence-open>

[/sourcelink]

Document 21.4 – The Scotsman

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Scotsman (Web)

Date: 12/11/2024

Page: 0

Reach: 273782

Value: 7349.0000

What is the Scottish Government's "gold standard"? How high and secondary school performance is ranked

A school's ranking all comes down to its most senior students Did you know with a Digital Subscription to The Scotsman, you can get unlimited access to the website including our premium content, as well as benefiting from fewer ads, loyalty rewards and much more.

The Scottish Government publishes performance data for state-funded schools each year.

Secondary school rankings hinge on how their students did in their Higher exams.

They are ranked based on what is known as the Government's 'gold standard'.

If schools have done equally well, there are two official tie-breakers available.

How well school leavers have done on their Highers can have a big impact on which universities they can land a place at.

But regardless of whether university is the next step for them or not, the qualifications and grades they leave high school with can open or even

close doors for them going forward. That is why making sure they go to a school that supports them to perform to the best of their abilities is so

important – and why so many parents turn to school league tables to help.

Scotland's state primary schools are ranked using ACEL (or Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels) data. This is a set of official

statistics that show the percentage of pupils across a range of different year groups who have achieved the expected levels in important schools

skills; literacy, numeracy, and speaking and listening.

But its state-funded secondary and high schools (you can check out the top 25 here) are ranked based on what the Scottish Government calls

its 'gold standard'. But what exactly is this, and how is it used to measure school performance?

Here's what you need to know:

How are Scotland's secondary schools ranked?

The Scottish Government publishes annual league tables rating the performance of the country's state primary and secondary schools each

year, usually around April or May. These are based on the previous academic year's performance data – so the figures published this year, for

example, are based on the 2022/23 school year's results.

Just like their counterparts across the UK, Scottish secondary school pupils will sit two main sets of qualifications during their time there, their

National 5 exams – or 'Nationals' – and their Highers. The Government bases its ratings on Higher exam results.

Stay up-to-date with the latest UK news and culture with our free UK Today newsletter.

Highers, roughly equivalent to the A Levels sat by students in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, are typically taken by students aged 16 to

18. According to UCAS – the UK's University and Colleges Admissions Service – students normally study between four and six different subjects

at this level, and their results can play a part in students getting a place at a university, or other tertiary institution.

When ranking secondary schools by performance, the official league table uses what it calls the 'gold standard' – set by Scottish Government's

education department. This is defined as the percentage of a school's students who sat their Highers that year, who passed five or more of them.

Schools are then ranked by this percentage. If two are equal, the number of pupils who obtained six or more passes is used to differentiate

between schools. This can even go up to seven or more passes where necessary, government information says

It is worth noting that if you also compare schools based on other league tables besides the official Scottish Government performance rankings, they may take other things into account too. You should always check what they say about the metric they use, so that you fully understand

how schools are being ranked.

What do you think about how the Scottish Government measures secondary school performance?

Have your say and make your voice heard by

leaving a comment below.

Amber Allott

[sourcelink]<https://www.scotsman.com/education/what-is-the-scottish-governments-gold-standard-how-high-and-secondary-school-performance-is-ranked-4862882>
[/sourcelink]

Document 22.1 – The Herald Online

Herald online

Wednesday 13 November 2024

Labour demands statement from Gilruth over SQA marking 'saga'

Scottish Labour has demanded that education secretary Jenny Gilruth makes a parliamentary statement over the ongoing controversy around the SQA's handling of this year's Higher History exam.

The party's education spokesperson, Pam Duncan-Glancy, says that "SNP has covered for the SQA instead of standing up for pupils and teachers" and called on Ms Gilruth to "provide some much-needed answers on this saga."

The intervention comes after The Herald reported that First Minister John Swinney may have misled MSPs when defending the SQA during last week's session of First Minister's Questions.

Mr Swinney claimed that "a thorough and independent review" had been carried out and added that the report had been "peer reviewed" by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

However, when asked about the approach taken during the investigation, including the decision to only interview those with links to Scotland's exam board and whose work was ultimately being investigated, a WJEC spokesperson refused to comment on the 'methodology' of the review.

Instead, they advised that their role had only been to ensure that the evidence provided in the report matched the conclusions presented. Questions about the way in which that evidence had been gathered were referred back to the SQA.

The SQA was forced to launch the investigation after teachers, including current markers, reported that the standard for Higher History had been altered after the exam had taken place. They accused the exam board, and specifically those in charge of History marking, of "moving the goalposts" and subjecting students to an "unfair" process.

Critics argued that this change was behind a 25% drop in pupils' performance levels in the Scottish History part of the exam, and a 13% decline in the overall pass rate.

The review, which was carried out by an SQA official, found that the exam board had acted properly and blamed pupils for the drastic drop in attainment rates and performance levels. Critics immediately accused the organisation of engaging in a 'whitewash', and teachers who contacted The Herald explicitly rejected the report's conclusions.

Scottish Labour Education spokesperson Pam Duncan-Glancy said: “The SNP has huge questions to answer about the chaos surrounding last year’s Higher History exam and the SQA’s handling of this fiasco.

“At every turn, the SNP has covered for the SQA instead of standing up for pupils and teachers.

“In light of these new revelations, the Education Secretary must come before the Parliament and provide some much-needed answers on this saga.

“Scottish education has been let down by SNP incompetence for too long – we need genuine reform and a change in direction.”

Responding after deadline and following publication of our original story, which stated that John Swinney may have misled MSPs when defending the SQA report, a Scottish Government spokesperson said: “These claims are totally untrue.

“It is a matter of public record that Richard Harry, Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC), independently peer reviewed and endorsed the SQAs report following their review into the marking of Higher History this year.

“The Scottish Government has accepted the findings of the SQA's report, including improving how feedback received from markers is considered.”

James McEnaney

Document 22.2 – The Daily Record page 12

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: Daily Record

Date: 14/11/2024

Page: 12

Reach: 82333

Value: 4952.7600

MINISTER’S SCHOOL BULLY ADMISSION..

MUST DO

BETTER Gilruth

aims to treat cyber abuse on same level as physical attacks

schools in 2021-22 found almost a third (31 per cent) of pupils from P5 to S3 had been bullied in the last year.

According to the research, 82 per cent of youngsters reported being bullied at school, with 36 per cent victims online.

The new guidance – published as part of Anti-Bullying Week 2024 – describes online or cyber bullying as being a “significant concern affecting children and young people in Scotland”, noting how social media, messaging platforms and gaming forums can all be used to “intimidate, isolate or humiliate individuals”.

It stresses the problem should not be treated as a “technological issue to be resolved”, making clear: “Online bullying should be seen as related to where the bullying occurs, rather than as a different behaviour type.”

It adds: “Online bullying can be as damaging as offline and may have more serious consequences due to the digital footprint, lasting presence, group dynamics and potential for illegality. “Online bullying should therefore be responded to with the same level of seriousness.”

EDUCATION Secretary Jenny Gilruth has admitted there is “room for improvement” in dealing with bullying in schools.

Speaking during a visit to Cowie Primary in Stirling, she cited “challenges” with how bullying is recorded, saying incidents are “often under-reported”.

She said the Scottish Government’s “clear expectation” is that “all reports of bullying should be recorded”, although she accepted “more rigorous recording” will “likely” lead to higher numbers of incidents in official data.

But she said such a stance “demonstrates a commitment to transparency and ensures that every allegation of bullying is taken seriously”. She was speaking as government guidance was published for schools to treat cyber and online bullying with “the same level of seriousness” as bullying in person.

Noting an inspection by Education Scotland had “highlighted some challenges implementing the previous guidance”, she added: “I am clear that there is still room for improvement.”

The Respect for All guidance is published after a census in Scotland’s

BY CHRIS McCALL

1

Document 22.3 – The Herald page 4

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: The Herald

Date: 14/11/2024

Page: 4

Reach: 22901

Value: 1543.2000

Labour demands statement from Gilruth over SQA Higher History 'saga'

James McEnaney

SCOTTISH Labour has demanded that Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth makes a parliamentary statement over the ongoing controversy around the SQA's handling of this year's Higher History exam.

The party's education spokesperson, Pam Duncan-Glancy, says that the "SNP has covered for the SQA instead of standing up for pupils and teachers", and called on Ms Gilruth to "provide some muchneeded answers on this saga".

The intervention comes a_er The Herald reported that First Minister John Swinney may have misled MSPs when defending the SQA during last week's session of First Minister's Questions.

Mr Swinney claimed that "a thorough and independent review" had been carried out and added that the report had been "peer reviewed" by the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC).

However, when asked about the approach taken during the investigation, including the decision to only interview those with links to Scotland's exam board and whose work was ultimately being investigated, a WJEC spokesperson refused to comment on the "methodology" of the review.

Instead, they advised that their role had only been to ensure that the evidence provided in the report matched the conclusions presented. Questions about the way in which that evidence had been gathered were referred back to the SQA.

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Concluded that this

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Critics immediately accused the organisation of engaging in a "whitewash", and teachers who contacted The Herald explicitly rejected the report's conclusions.

Scottish Labour education spokesperson Ms Duncan-Glancy said: "The SNP has huge questions to answer about the chaos surrounding last year's Higher History exam and the SQA's handling of this fiasco. At every turn, the SNP has covered for the SQA instead of standing up for pupils and teachers. In light of these new revelations, the Education Secretary must come before the

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Responding to our original story, which stated that Mr Swinney may have misled MSPs when defending the SQA report, a Scottish Government spokesperson said:

“These claims are totally untrue.

“The Scottish Government has accepted the findings of the SQA’ s report, including improving how feedback received from markers is considered.”

Document 22.4 – PAS Media

SCOTLAND Bullying

Room for improvement in tackling school bullies, says Gilruth as guidance issued

By Katrine Bussey, PA Scotland Political Editor

12:53 - 13 Nov 2024

Education Secretary Jenny Gilruth has made clear there is “room for improvement” in dealing with bullying in Scotland’s schools, as guidance was published by the Scottish Government.

She cited “challenges” with how bullying is recorded, saying incidents involving such behaviour are “often under-reported”.

She said the Scottish Government’s “clear expectation” is that “all reports of bullying should be recorded” – although she accepted “more rigorous recording” will “likely” lead to higher numbers of incidents in official data.

But Ms Gilruth said such a stance “demonstrates a commitment to transparency and ensures that every allegation of bullying is taken seriously”.

She was speaking as guidance was published which sets out that schools must treat incidents of online or cyber bullying with “the same level of seriousness” as bullying that takes place in person.

Noting an inspection by Education Scotland had “highlighted some challenges implementing the previous guidance”, Ms Gilruth said: “I am clear that there is still room for improvement.”

The Respect for All guidance is published after a census in Scotland’s schools in 2021-22 found almost a third (31%) of pupils from P5 to S3 had been bullied in the last year.

According to the research, 82% of youngsters reported being bullied at school, while 36% experienced it online.

The new guidance – published as part of Anti-Bullying Week 2024 – describes online or cyber bullying as being a “significant concern affecting children and young people in Scotland”, noting how social media, messaging platforms and gaming forums can all be used to “intimidate, isolate or humiliate individuals”.

It stresses the problem should not be treated as a “technological issue to be resolved”, making clear: “Online bullying should be seen as related to where the bullying occurs, rather than as a different behaviour type.”

It adds: “Online bullying can be as damaging as offline bullying and may have more serious consequences due to the digital footprint, lasting presence, group dynamics, and potential for illegality.

“Online bullying should therefore be responded to with the same level of seriousness as any other form of offline bullying.”

Speaking during a visit to Cowie Primary in Stirling, Ms Gilruth said: “Bullying of any kind is never acceptable and can have a lasting impact on a child or young person’s life.

“It is vital that incidents of bullying, both online and offline, are addressed promptly and robustly.”

Adding the new guidance “focuses on prevention, response and inclusivity”, the Education Secretary said it also “reflects the pressures facing young people, including the increase in social media use”.

Lorraine Glass, director of the anti-bullying service respectme, welcomed the “vital guidance” and added: “We look forward to working with colleagues across Scotland to further embed the policy and practice necessary for the safety and wellbeing of all children and young people.

“This week, over 700 schools from every Scottish local authority area have engaged with our annual campaign on what ‘respect’ means to them.

“It’s been a phenomenal response and a testament to the commitment and energy of teachers, parents and youth workers to bring safety and happiness to young lives.”

[View in Mediapoint](#)

Document 22.5 – PAS Media

EDUCATION Experiential learning

Why England's new curriculum should involve as much hands-on learning as possible

Contributed by The Conversation

14:25 - 13 Nov 2024

It is vital that children are motivated and engaged by the way they are taught at school, and that teachers use methods that help them learn in the most effective ways.

My [new research with colleagues](#) has shown that teaching the curriculum through experiential – hands-on – learning can be a very effective way to help primary age children learn.

England is in the [middle of a review](#) of the national curriculum, the current version of which has been taught in schools since 2014. This provides a welcome opportunity to put these research findings into practice.

What is experiential learning?

The key feature of experiential learning is that learners actively engage with a tangible, felt experience.

For example, instead of a teacher telling pupils about how vegetables grow and how they end up on our plates, and using a textbook to help children read the necessary knowledge, for an experiential learning approach to the topic the teacher would plan for children to grow vegetables with the purpose of learning about food and cooking. The children would cook the vegetables then eat them.

The teacher could make the class relevant to the experiences of their pupils by discussing the kinds of vegetables they eat at home and at school, and the foods that are grown in their local area.

Teachers also plan these experiences in a way that requires learners to engage with real-world problems. For instance, the class might discuss how hard it can be for some people to access healthy food. The teacher would also plan for children to get further information from appropriate internet sources and books.

In lessons taught through experiential learning children are active participants. The teacher isn't at the front of the class, lecturing, but they aren't a passive bystander either – they interact with students to support their learning.

Our [research](#) investigated the extent to which experiential learning was effective or not. We carried out an evidence assessment – reviewing a large number of research studies carried out on this topic to find trends. And we focused in particular on primary education.

We found that there was strong evidence, from different kinds of research, to show that experiential learning was an effective way to teach primary school children. In particular, there was evidence of its effectiveness for science subjects, but also that it was useful across the curriculum for children with learning difficulties.

A [study](#) carried out with nine- and ten-year-olds in Taiwan, for example, investigated how well they learned about aquatic ecology. The study compared two groups of children, one learning in a more traditional style and the other through experiential methods, encountering the living creatures outside the classroom. The children in the experiential learning group showed better achievement.

The [full report](#) from our research shows that experiential learning can also improve children's wellbeing. A number of studies found that children's confidence grew; studies also showed that their relationships with each other and collaboration skills improved.

Interpreting the curriculum

Approaches to teaching the curriculum that have a strong emphasis on the knowledge to be taught, more than the processes of learning, are sometimes called "traditional" teaching approaches. Alternative approaches, such as experiential learning, are considered kinds of "progressive education". [Debates have raged](#) about whether progressive education is better than traditional education.

American philosopher John Dewey, who is regarded as a leading figure for ideas about progressive education, [argued that](#) there was an organic connection between education and learners' personal experiences. Dewey argued that when teaching effectively engages children to make sense of their own worlds, through experiential learning, they were more likely to develop new understanding.

England's current national curriculum, instituted in 2014, leans more towards traditional education. It has been called a "[knowledge-based curriculum](#)".

A knowledge-based curriculum is one where the learning of what is regarded as essential knowledge by some people, such as learning what a fronted adverbial is in English lessons. This is emphasised above the learning of less tangible elements, such as the skill to persuade through writing. I am not arguing that the learning of skills is completely absent from England's 2014 national curriculum, but that the emphasis on a particular conception of knowledge is [far too dominant](#).

The personal experiences of learners are not seen as central to knowledge-based teaching. This is because the main emphasis is on directly instructing them to learn new knowledge that has been deemed to be important: "the best that has been thought and written", as the Education Secretary in 2014 [Michael Gove put it, misquoting poet Matthew Arnold](#).

But of course, this begs the question of who gets to decide what knowledge is "the best". It also does not take into consideration how, or if, this teaching will relate to pupils' needs, interests and prior experiences.

An experiential learning approach has more of an emphasis on the development of skills. If we take the teaching of writing, for example, in experiential learning pupils engage with writing processes for defined audiences and purposes. They are taught to manipulate

words and sentences for specific effects on readers, and they are given more choice over the topics of their writing. This is a different approach to learning knowledge about grammatical terms to supposedly help with writing.

One implication of our research is that a reconsideration of the benefits of the philosophy and practices of experiential learning could lead to benefits for pupils' learning, and for national curricula. This is particularly important for England at a moment when a new curriculum offers an opportunity for change.

Dominic Wyse receives funding from The Helen Hamlyn Trust; and has received funding from The Leverhulme Trust and The Nuffield Foundation.

Authors

- Dominic Wyse, Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education, UCL

Source: <https://theconversation.com/why-englands-new-curriculum-should-involve-as-much-hands-on-learning-as-possible-242033>

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Document 22.6 – TESS Online

CfE review ‘must make clear what pupils need to know at each stage’

Replacement of CfE's 'experiences and outcomes' is recommended, but Education Scotland research says level of prescribed learning could vary by subject and sector

14th November 2024, 8:00am

Emma Seith

The **Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC)** must address the “vagueness” of Curriculum for Excellence's (CfE's) **experiences and outcomes (Es&Os)** and “the disconnect” between upper and lower secondary school, finds a paper from Education Scotland.

The paper also says the CIC must “declutter the curriculum, and clarify the position of knowledge”, calling for “greater clarity...on what knowledge learners should have,

at each stage” and “an understanding of what is meant by knowledge and its purpose in the context of CfE”.

It recommends the Es&Os be replaced - or “evolved” - after teachers rejected the idea that simplifying or refining current guidance would be enough “to address questions around the role of knowledge”.

‘Big ideas’ approach recommended

An alternative approach highlighted in the paper is “a **‘big ideas’ model** to support curriculum coherence”. Big ideas, says the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), are “broad, interdisciplinary concepts that transcend specific subject areas and address deeper understanding”.

Today’s paper states: “The [**broad general education**] in secondary could be restructured and organised into broader learning areas, possibly based on the ‘big ideas’ or cross-curricular knowledge and skills. This would then allow learners to consolidate their learning and address the concerns participants had previously expressed around the lack of depth in learning with current structures, where learners can be potentially engaging with 18 different subjects.”

-
- Background: **Curriculum for Excellence review - how it will work**
 - Related: **Secondaries ‘starting again’ as pupils lack ‘common knowledge base’**
 - Feature: **What does the quiet reform of Education Scotland mean for the future?**
-

The findings stem from the curriculum review pilots carried out by Education Scotland between February 2023 and April 2024.

The pilots - which involved over 450 participants, most of them practising teachers and headteachers - were designed to test the best approaches to curriculum review after the **OECD recommended in its 2021 report** that Scotland develop “a systematic curriculum review cycle”. However, the pilots also explored some of the other issues raised in the OECD report.

Secondary students redoing work covered in primary schools

One consequence of the lack of clarity over knowledge in CfE, participants report, is that important topics are not being studied in enough depth. Also, students may have to “redo work covered during their primary education” when they transition to secondary, alongside peers covering these topics for the first time.

There is also a push to get through “too much content” in CfE. The upshot is “a rush through the curriculum to cover content at the expense of sound conceptual understanding and deeper learning” which the report notes are “two features often associated with high-performing systems”.

The report - published today and entitled *Curriculum Improvement Cycle (CIC): Background and a Case for Change* - highlights that “since the introduction of CfE, numerous additional layers have been added to the curriculum without consideration being given to what should be removed or reduced”.

It says: “Presently, as well as the **five Building the Curriculum guidance documents**, there are 1,850 statements of learning within the Es&Os, 1,000 benchmarks, a series of cross-curricular themes and initiatives, four capacities, four contexts for learning, 16 principles and practice papers and eight curricular areas.”

The paper calls for this “technical framework” - which is what teachers use to plan what children will learn - to be “evolved”.

Teachers’ perspectives differ by subject

However, today’s paper explains teachers’ perspectives on how much clarity or prescription is required moving forward differs by subject.

The research finds teachers of subjects such as maths - described as “hierarchical” subjects - are keen for greater prescription but teachers of “horizontal” subjects, such as expressive arts, wanted “autonomy to plan a curriculum that fits their context and school community”.

Those involved in the **modern languages** pilots, meanwhile, “indicated opposition to a highly prescribed framework”, but suggested that more prescription might be useful in primaries where teachers are not languages specialists.

The paper concludes: “Any evolved technical framework for the curriculum must address the tensions between autonomy and prescription, with sufficient nuance to appreciate the differences between particular subjects.”

Pilots to allow educators ‘to be actively involved’

The paper is the first promised by Education Scotland as it takes forward the CIC. A second paper, expected in December, will look at what a new technical framework might look like. A third, due in early 2025, will look at how change will happen.

Ollie Bray - the strategic director at Education Scotland responsible for curriculum, pedagogy and innovation - says the pilots were about figuring out how best to go about reviewing the curriculum.

The approach being taken to curriculum review - which he set out **in a recent interview with Tes Scotland** - represents a change of tack for Education Scotland. This is also reflected in today's paper, which says the pilots allowed educators "to be actively involved in discussions and make contributions which shaped [Education Scotland's] work, rather than being subjected to a 'top-down' approach as described by the OECD".

It is expected that curriculum review cycles will span 10 years, starting and ending with an exercise similar to the **"national discussion" on Scottish education**, which reported in May 2023. Reviews are already underway in: maths, English and literacy; Gaelic and literacy; science; and health and wellbeing.

Education Scotland plans to begin reviewing all curricular areas this school year.

For the latest Scottish education news, analysis and features delivered directly to your inbox, sign up to Tes magazine's The Week in Scotland newsletter

Emma Seith

Document 22.7 – TESS Online

Client: SQA Combined Media Coverage

Source: Times Education Supplement (Web)

Date: 13/11/2024

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Treat online and offline bullying with 'same seriousness'

Online bullying may have more serious consequences, suggests first anti-bullying guidance from Scottish government in seven years Schools

are being told to respond to online bullying "with the same level of seriousness" as in-person bullying.

The Scottish government's anti-bullying guidance, , says that face-to-face bullying remains more common than online incidents.

However, it warns that online bullying – including video footage and non-consensual image sharing – can be "as damaging as offline bullying and may have more serious consequences due to the digital footprint, lasting presence, group dynamics and potential for illegality".

It also states: "Online bullying can happen anywhere at any time, making it more pervasive and harder to find respite from than other forms of bullying."

Background:

Related:

News:

The found that 31 per cent of pupils in P5-S3 had been bullied in the past year. Of those who had been bullied in the past year, 82 per cent experienced bullying at school and 36 per cent experienced bullying online.

Published today, the government's anti-bullying guidance – which had not been updated for seven years – follows a thematic inspection carried out by Education Scotland

It found that in about a third of schools, leaders did not have a whole-school process for monitoring bullying incidents, "making it difficult to identify patterns and trends across the school, therefore limiting proactive interventions by staff".

In a foreword to the guidance, the education secretary Jenny Gilruth says "all reports of bullying should be recorded".

Better recording of bullying incidents deemed key

Ms Gilruth accepts this means that "the number of bullying incidents will likely increase".

However, she says that recording allows schools to assess the effectiveness of policy and practice, monitor recurring patterns or trends and, "most importantly", ensure the necessary support is in place for pupils.

The guidance – which contains more information on prejudice-based bullying – sets out in detail the information that should be recorded, including the type of bullying, whether it is prejudice-based and details of any protected characteristics. It says that bullying incidents can be recorded and monitored by schools and councils using , the information system that manages student data in Scottish schools.

The definition of bullying has also been strengthened. The guidance reflects a renewed focus on the emotional, social and physical impact; it recognises that not all bullying is an intentional act and that it does not need to be repeated for it to have an impact.

However, the guidance also looks at the kind of behaviour that should not count as bullying. It says "conflict is not the same as bullying" and that falling out and disagreeing is "a normal part of growing up".

All local authorities, schools and organisations that work with children and young people will now be tasked with developing and implementing anti-bullying policies in line with Respect for All

Document 22.8 – TESS Online

TESS online

Wednesday 13 November 2024

Ministerial statement demanded over handling of Higher history review

The SQA marking review was published after the Higher history pass rate dropped by more than 10 percentage points – but Scottish Labour says ‘huge questions’ remain unanswered

Scottish Labour is demanding a ministerial statement on “the chaos surrounding last year’s Higher history exam” and “handling of this fiasco” by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), saying “huge questions” remained unanswered.

The review, published earlier this month, was carried out after teachers and parents raised concerns about the drop in the Higher history pass rate this year.

Just 65.7 per cent of students this year attained an A-C grade, a drop of 13.1 percentage points since 2023.

The fall was originally highlighted in Tes Scotland in August. At the time, the SQA said there was “no change to the approach or standard of the Higher history question papers”, but that there was “a drop in learners’ performance in the question papers”.

However, SQA markers and teachers disputed this and plans for a review were made public on Friday 20 September. Concerns centred on paper two, which focuses on Scottish history. They said there were changes made to the marking standards in 2024, with students required to give more detail than in previous years to gain full marks.

Ultimately, the review concluded that the standard was “not higher than that set in previous years” and that “candidates were not expected to be more specific when answering in order to gain marks than in previous years”.

It blamed “the poor standard of performance demonstrated by learners” for the drop in pass rate.

Teachers question findings of SQA Higher history review

However, teachers continue to question why, if the cohort this year was poor, other subjects did not suffer a similar drop in passes.

The review, meanwhile, does acknowledge that markers gave “mixed feedback on the marking instructions”.

Some markers said the instructions were “very clear and well laid out” and “excellent as usual”, but other comments chimed with the concerns that teachers had been expressing. One marker commented that “the standard appeared to be much stricter this year for certain topics”; another said it was “harsh”.

Now, the Scottish Labour education spokesperson Pam Duncan-Glancy is saying that the education secretary Jenny Gilruth “must come before the Parliament and provide some much-needed answers on this saga”.

She said: “The SNP has huge questions to answer about the chaos surrounding last year’s Higher history exam and the SQA’s handling of this fiasco.

“At every turn, the SNP has covered for the SQA instead of standing up for pupils and teachers.”

Emma Seith

Document 23.1 – Herald Online, Lessons to learn News

The questions over Higher History marking saga just won't stop coming

James McEnaney
14 Nov 2024 17:19:37

This article appears as part of the Lessons to Learn newsletter.

Pretty much since this year’s exam results were released, we’ve been reporting on an ongoing controversy over the way in which one of the papers was marked.

Teachers (including exam markers) accused the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) of “moving the goalposts” for

Higher History by changing the marking standard after the exam had taken place.

The SQA insisted that this was false but then quietly opened an investigation into the matter. It was, however, carried out

by a senior member of SQA staff and ended up being very, very late.

The report, which we were first told would be out by the end of September, was finally released on 6 November. In it, the

SQA declared that there had been no problems with Higher History marking, that systems had worked as intended, and

that the huge declines in pass rates and performance levels were just down to the pupils not being very good this year.

The Chief Executive said that the report was 'robust and rigorous' and the SQA also pointed out that it had asked another exam board – the Welsh Joint Education Committee (WJEC) – to 'provide independent assurance that any conclusions reached were evidence-based and valid'.

Exclusive | Swinney has 'questions to answer' over SQA review of Higher History exam marking

The SQA tried very, very hard to make this the point at which we all 'draw a line' under the issue, but it didn't work – which is entirely unsurprising.

Instead, the criticism started almost immediately.

The Scottish Conservatives' education spokesperson talked about a "whitewash", while Labour's Pam Duncan-Glancy was aghast that the SQA had "decided to try and blame pupils and teachers for what went wrong here."

SNP MSP, and former government minister, Fergus Ewing said that the report seemed to be "more of an exercise in selfjustification

by the SQA than an honest attempt to answer legitimate and serious questions from children teachers and

parents." He also hit out at the lack of scrutiny to which quangos like the exam board tend to be subjected.

But worse – far worse – was to come because we also started getting the reaction from History teachers.

They called the outcome, and the SQA's conduct, "a disgrace" and a "gut punch" that had left teachers "confused and

demoralised". One Faculty Head was absolutely explicit that they would now seek to guide students away from taking

Higher History and encourage them to instead consider subjects like Modern Studies, Geography and Politics, adding:

"Those in charge of assessment have effectively destroyed the subject."

A couple of teachers wrote a bit more extensively for us, laying out in considerable and damning detail their lack of faith in

both the investigation that had been carried out and the SQA itself.

And it didn't stop there, because questions were also soon being asked about the actual methodology behind the SQA's

investigation.

The Herald discovered that, during the course of the review, the only people interviewed were those with links to the SQA

– specifically, the 'senior appointees' whose work was, we all thought, supposed to be the very thing being examined.

We also contacted the WJEC, who confirmed that the person providing the 'independent' oversight of the investigation

had only spoken to two people: both of them senior SQA officials.

When challenged about all of this in parliament, First Minister John Swinney seemed determined, even desperate, to back

the SQA – something that a number of people have told me felt an awful lot like what happened back in 2020, when he

spent a week trying to defend the now-infamous exam algorithm that suppressed the grades of the pupils from the

poorest areas in Scotland. He even went so far as to claim that a process of "peer review" had taken place.

But had it?

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Lessons to Learn | I took an expert to a STEM event. Here's what happened. One of the things we tried to clarify was what, exactly, the WJEC was endorsing, and what sort of processes had been followed as part of that work. We laid out the concerns that the review only involved interviews with SQA appointees, and explicitly asked if the endorsement they had offered also extended to this aspect of the methodology. They told us that "the analysis supports the report's conclusions" but refused to comment on the methodology or scope of the investigation. Those questions, they said, would have to be directed to the SQA, which says it stands by the work that was carried out and believes that it is robust and credible. An SQA spokesperson said: "The Executive Director of Qualifications and Assessment at WJEC, an expert in standard setting in the context of national examinations, provided independent, external scrutiny and challenge of the review, including the evidence, conclusions and wider reflections. We provided Mr Harry [Richard Harry, WJEC executive director of qualifications and assessment] with whatever additional information he asked for to be able to undertake his work and he has publicly acknowledged the review team's candour and openness to challenge through this process." The matter has now been taken up in parliament, with John Swinney told he has "questions to answer" and should "come clean", and the education secretary under pressure to make a statement about the latest stage of the "saga". Sign up for a weekly expert insight into Scottish education straight to your inbox. The big question is this: is it reasonable to call an investigation 'robust and rigorous' when the person leading it (who works for the same organisation as the one accused of 'moving the goalposts') only interviewed people with something to lose from a negative outcome – specifically the marking team who would have been responsible for the conduct that had been alleged? And, on a related note, is "peer review" an accurate description for a process that was not anonymous and that, so far as we know based on the public statements of those involved, did not involve full consideration of the methodology and processes that generated the evidence behind the report's conclusions? So far, the answers to those questions certainly don't seem to be resoundingly affirmative.

Document 23.2 – The Paisley Daily Express (page 3)

BARISTA ACADEMY SO SUCCESSFUL

Coffee is toffee

for Skills kids

TAYLOR MURRAY

Young people from across Renfrewshire have been brewing up new skills thanks to the help of a coffee expert.

Ryan Sinclair, who owns Ko_ee Kart and Standards Hospitality, has been helping 12 young people from Kibble's Skills Academy pave the way to become the next barista icons.

They attended the training day hosted at the purpose-use Skills Academy, part of the Kibble Group, which saw them learn the basics of being a barista, latte art and how to create the perfect cup of co_ee.

Those who attend the Skills Academy have struggled to engage in mainstream education and attend the purpose-use facility to gain qualifications while learning skills that will help them transition into the workplace.

Ryan began his own journey in hospitality at the young age of 16 and has worked in cafes, restaurants and now offers wedding catering and training with his years of knowledge and experience._

He said:_ "Building a career in hospitality has been incredibly rewarding for me and I hope that providing these young people with skills I can help them take their own _rst steps into this world."

Through an ongoing partnership programme with local businesses

and organisations, the Skills Academy offers education and training opportunities to meet unique or vocational needs of the young people who use its services.

The ethos of the Skills Academy is to provide pathways into employment for kids who have experienced social disadvantage or vulnerability, struggle to engage in mainstream education and ease the transition from full-time education into a workplace.

Lisa Wardlaw, head of Skills Academy, said: "Barista training is something we've wanted to offer our young people for some time now, with hospitality being an appealing and accessible route into the world of work for many young people.

"I'm really pleased that we managed to set up a partnership with Ryan and he was able to impart some of his wellhoned skills and expertise.

"I could see the confidence growing throughout the day and, for me, that highlights exactly what the Skills Academy is all about."

Leaving with a certificate and a newfound confidence in latte art, one young person said: "I could see myself working in a coffee shop now, and maybe one day I could open my own cafe – I'd call it Coffee To Go!"

The Skills Academy is a purposeuse space that offers young people experience in a range of roles including mechanics, joinery, hairdressing, painting and decorating and gardening. It works closely with local authorities and schools to provide SQA

and City & Guilds certified courses and qualifications to young people throughout the area.



Document 23.3 – The Times Online

Scottish school league table 2024: the best secondary schools revealed

Jordanhill School in Glasgow has been given the top spot, also impressing the Scottish education secretary on a recent visit

Helen Puttick

11 Nov 2024 16:48:47

Pressure is growing on Scottish ministers to adopt a more independent model for Scotland's state schools after the only secondary free from council control emerged as the top performer for the seventh year in a row.

Jordanhill School, which lies in the Glasgow catchment area but which is funded directly by a government grant, had 89 per cent of pupils depart with at least five highers in the summer of 2023.

Five highers is the Scottish government's gold standard of academic performance and is the minimum entry

requirement for many top university courses for Scottish pupils.

The performance put Jordanhill, which is independently governed and decides its own spending priorities, at

the head of The Sunday Times Scotland High School League Table for 2024.

Bearsden Academy, in East Dunbartonshire, remains Scotland's leading council-run school, with 81 per cent

of leavers scoring five highers. East Renfrewshire was the council with the most schools in the top ten, with

four, while Boclair Academy, in East Dunbartonshire, is the highest new entry, rising ten places to sixth since

last year.

Educational experts have been urging the Scottish government to replicate

Jordanhill's unique funding

model, as it consistently outstrips schools run by local authorities.

Walter Humes, honorary professor of education at the University of Stirling, said the success of Jordanhill

may lie in its "independent status", which is unencumbered by "the bureaucratic structures of local

government".

He said: "In the state sector, headteachers are told that they are in a line

management relationship to the

authority and their first loyalty is to the 'officers of the council' rather than to the pupils, parents or

community.

"I know of one secondary head in a state school — in a mixed social area — who said privately that he would

welcome the freedom that Jordanhill enjoys but, given the conformist culture of Scottish education, few

heads would be willing to say so in public."

Humes said questions had been raised about the continuing viability of having 32 local authorities

responsible for state education. One former director of education in Highland and Aberdeenshire, Bruce

Robertson, has been reported as saying that education should be taken out of local authority control and

placed in the hands of boards similar to those that run health authorities.

"That is unlikely to happen any time soon because of budget constraints," he added.

Jenny Gilruth, the education secretary, said that she had recently visited the school, in [an interview with the Sunday Times in March](#)

Gilruth said: “I think it is an interesting model. I think there is more we can learn from Jordanhill that we are perhaps not learning.”

Jordanhill is run by a board of managers, made up of seven parents and three staff members, selected by other parents and staff. It also has professional advisers alongside the board and a rector who runs the school and implements the board’s decisions.

The school’s leaders say that the government grant affords significant autonomy on the structure of the curriculum, subjects offered and teacher recruitment. It also benefits from increased engagement from parents and its location in an affluent suburb of Glasgow.

Liam Kerr, the Scottish Conservative education spokesman, said: “Most people realised years ago that there is much we can learn from Jordanhill’s successful model. The education secretary’s warm words are welcome but leave no time to waste. Despite the best efforts of our hardworking teachers, staff, education professionals and parents and pupils themselves, pupils across Scotland often experience a poorer standard of education.”

Kerr added: “Successive SNP cabinet secretaries have dithered and tinkered around the edges of education reform, rather than proactively replicating best practice.”

Alison Payne, research director at the independent think tank Reform Scotland, said previously that a new model affording greater independence to school boards should be considered in light of Jordanhill’s sustained success.

“While you want good outcomes, you need to enable schools to implement the best policies to reach those outcomes. Too often we have central diktat and it’s not always properly thought out,” she said.

“It’s about empowering headteachers and letting them have the freedom to address the specific needs of their schools, enabling them to work with the community. We need to appreciate that things might be different in different areas.”

Christopher Chapman, professor of educational policy at the University of Glasgow, also questioned the “one size fits all model” in Scottish schools. “It’s important for teachers to have the ability to engage in research and teacher-led inquiry that can develop evidence-based practices [that are rooted in the teachers’ own classrooms](#)

,” he said.

In general, more schools in Scotland are achieving higher rates of the gold standard of five higher. This year

70 per cent was the minimum entry requirement for a place in the top ten.

The tables show that East Dunbartonshire missed out on the opportunity to rival East Renfrewshire as

Scotland’s top performing local authority, with Bishopbriggs Academy falling ten places to 20th. Douglas

Academy retained its place in the top ten, although falling four places to ninth.

East Renfrewshire’s four schools in the top ten remained — Mearns Castle High School rising five places to

third, St Ninian’s High School falling one place to fourth, Woodfarm High School falling three places to

seventh and Williamwood High School falling one place to eighth.

Linlithgow Academy, in West Lothian, reclaimed a place in the top ten for the first time since 2016, with 70

per cent of pupils scoring five higher.

Boroughmuir High School remains Edinburgh’s only top ten school. The capital’s schools underperform

relative to the affluence of the catchment areas, as about one in four pupils in the city go to private school.

But Cults Academy in Aberdeenshire fell out of the top ten this year, falling ten spots to 16th place.

Analysis of the tables shows that the most improved school with more than 400 pupils, in terms of

performance, is Lochgilphead High School, in Argyll and Bute. It reached 36 per cent gold standard pupils, up

16 percentage points since 2022.

Woodmill High School in Fife, one of the biggest schools in Scotland with more than 1,400 pupils, delivered

50 per cent gold standard pupils for the first time. This was a 13 point increase on 2022 and up 22 points

since 2016.

St John’s RC Academy in Perth and Kinross, also had a record year, with 48 per cent gold standard students.

Glasgow Gaelic School reclaimed its position just outside the top ten — 12th — with 68 per cent gold standard.

The results echo concerns over falling standards in Scotland’s state schools. In December, the publication of

the latest Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores, compiled by the Organisation for

Economic Co-operation and Development and which compare the education of 15-year-olds around the

world, showed the pandemic had

[caused children to fall behind in many countries](#)

, although not all.

Scotland had large declines, equivalent to almost a year in maths, six months in reading and a term in

science, since the previous assessment in 2018. Scotland's fall down the ranking has been blamed in part on the Curriculum for Excellence, launched in 2010, which aims for each child to be a "successful learner, a confident individual, a responsible citizen and an effective contributor". While the national curriculum in England sets out in detail what children should learn each year, such as specific vocabulary, the Scottish curriculum benchmarks have been criticised for being too vague and badly thought out, leading to a "severe decline" in standards. Other factors have also been partially blamed. Scottish ministers have also come under fire for pursuing a policy of "restorative justice" in schools, which minimises the exclusion of pupils even if their actions are repeatedly disruptive to classmates and teaching staff. This particularly affects schools in less affluent areas, which may suffer from greater numbers of disruptive pupils.

Top ten Scottish secondary schools

1.
Jordanhill School, Glasgow
2.
Bearsden Academy, East Dunbartonshire
3. Mearns Castle High School, East Renfrewshire
4.
St Ninian's High School, East Renfrewshire
5.
Boroughmuir High School, Edinburgh City
6.
Boclair Academy, East Dunbartonshire
7. Woodfarm High School, East Renfrewshire
8. Williamwood High School, East Renfrewshire
9. Douglas Academy, East Dunbartonshire
10.
Linlithgow Academy, West Lothian

[Related Images](#)



The top performing school has a lot to teach ministers, the education secretary said

ILLUSTRATION BY NINA KRAUSE



Jordanhill School is run by a management board of parents and staff members



St Ninian's High School dropped one place but is still in the top ten secondary schools
Les Gallagher



Woodfarm High School, one of the biggest schools in Scotland, continues to perform well
Mark F Gibson / Gibson Digital

Document 23.4 – TESS Online

TESS online

Thursday 14 November 2024

Reform delays hamper schools, but SLS sees some positive signs

Despite frustration over education reform, School Leaders Scotland president hits upbeat note over 'steadfast' support from Education Scotland

A glut of reports in recent times has set out “clear paths” to improve Scottish education, but “stalled” progress has left schools facing “the same challenges year after year”.

However, the annual gathering of Scottish secondary school leaders also heard an upbeat account of improved working relationships with Education Scotland and the inspectorate, which were described as “remarkable”.

Those were headline messages from the outgoing School Leaders Scotland (SLS) president Peter Bain in a speech to members in Aberdeen this morning.

“We must also acknowledge the slow pace at which reform is moving,” Mr Bain told the SLS annual conference. “Despite our collective efforts, we continue to feel frustration as the much-needed changes remain, at times, out of reach.”

“The pace of change - slow, complex and, at times, stalled - has tested our patience and resilience. Our ambition is to see concrete improvements that respond to the real needs of our schools, but we often find ourselves waiting for these changes to materialise.”

‘Clear paths’ set out for schools

Recommendations from various reports (he cited the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Muir, Hayward, Withers and Morgan) had “laid out clear paths” and “practical insights into how we can improve curriculum, assessment, inclusion and overall school support”.

However, Mr Bain said the pace of implementation has been “disappointingly slow”.

He said: “The delays in reform mean that our schools continue to face the same challenges year after year. We lack the clarity and consistency necessary to move forward with confidence.”

He added: “Funding constraints, ambiguities in policy and a lack of targeted support have hampered our ability to fully implement the vision we all share. These delays are not just abstract; they affect real pupils and real educators who need more immediate improvements.”

However, Mr Bain also said that “this frustration should not overshadow the commitment and the remarkable efforts being made by national partners like Education Scotland and [the schools inspectorate] HMIE”.

He added: “They too work within constraints, striving to support schools while navigating the complexities of reform. Their dedication to advancing Scotland’s educational goals, often against substantial odds, is something we must recognise and appreciate.”

Mr Bain, who is executive headteacher of Oban and Tiree schools, said that Education Scotland had been a particularly “steadfast partner”. Under Gillian Hamilton’s leadership, it had been “committed to looking for new ways in which to engage with us”.

He praised the time the interim Education Scotland chief executive had dedicated to meeting with schools, school leaders and local authorities.

He also recommended that SLS members sign up to be Education Scotland “associates”, which “may have the same positive impact as all the HMIE associate assessors are having”.

The inspectorate - which is to be separated from Education Scotland as part of ongoing reforms - also deserves “our recognition”, said Mr Bain, as its approach, for the most part, “has evolved to be more supportive, collaborative and focused on continuous improvement, rather than one-time judgements”.

‘Deafening cry’ to remove gradings

However, Mr Bain also highlighted one area of urgent improvement for the inspectorate: there is a “deafening cry” for the removal of the gradings and to “replace the one-word evaluative focus with a summary of success and development areas”.

He added that the current approach was “akin to kids just looking at the essay mark and ignoring all our suggestions for improvement”.

Following inspection, Scottish schools do not receive an overall rating. However, they are still graded on a six-point scale that ranges from “excellent” to “unsatisfactory” for their performance in key areas such as “learning, teaching and assessment” and “raising attainment and achievement”.

Mr Bain’s parting message was for SLS members to “reaffirm our commitment to compassion and ambition”.

He said: “Compassion will keep us grounded, reminding us to support each other, to listen to one another, and to be patient with the pace of progress while remaining steadfast in our advocacy for change.

“Ambition will drive us forward, ensuring that we do not settle for less than our vision of excellence in Scottish education.”

Mr Bain’s successor as SLS president is Pauline Walker, headteacher of The Royal High School, in Edinburgh.

Henry Hepburn