



Exploring Perspectives on National Qualification Marker Recruitment, Retention and Experiences

Rachel Whitford, Susie Hill, and Jake Green

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The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow, G2 8DQ
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Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	1
Method	1
Key findings	2
Considerations	3
Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Research aims and objectives	7
Ethics	7
Research design and sampling	7
Research with markers	8
Research with non-markers	10
Respondent profiles	12
Findings	15
Benefits of marking	15
Challenges associated with marking	17
Stopping and withdrawing from marking	39
Reasons for not marking	40
Marking for other awarding bodies	44
Improving recruitment and retention	49
Appendix	53

Executive summary

Introduction

SQA recruits around 7,500 individual markers annually for National Qualifications (NQ), but in recent years has faced challenges in recruiting and retaining markers, including a decline in marker availability across subjects and an increase in unmarked scripts. In response to these issues, SQA conducted a comprehensive review between February and April 2025 to better understand marker experiences, motivations, and barriers, and to identify potential improvements to its marking system.

Method

This research aimed to understand why SQA markers withdraw from marking and why eligible non-markers choose not to mark, with the purpose of using the findings to improve recruitment and retention of markers.

Those who marked NQs for SQA in 2022, 2023 and 2024 were randomly selected to take part in a survey about their views of marking over the past three years between February and March 2025. The survey received 768 full responses. Following the survey, 17 markers from a range of subject areas took part in semi-structured interviews to explore their views in more depth.

Educators who had not marked for SQA were invited to take part in a survey via SQA News in May 2025 that explored the reasons why they had chosen not to mark. The survey elicited 557 full responses.

The qualitative data was analysed thematically using NVivo and the quantitative data was analysed using Microsoft Excel to produce simple, descriptive statistics.

Key findings

Main benefits of marking

- ◆ Many participants cited enhanced understanding of national standards as the key benefit of marking, with positive impacts on learners, departments, and teaching practice.
- ◆ Many also valued the networking opportunities it provides.

Main challenges of marking

Remuneration

Pay was the most significant concern. Although not the primary motivation for marking, many participants felt the financial reward had diminished to the point of questioning its value — especially due to tax implications that pushed earnings into higher bands.

Since 2013, pay increases have lagged behind inflation and teacher salary growth. Several participants reported effective pay rates falling below minimum wage. Low pay contributed to feelings of markers being undervalued, and there were concerns that it affected morale and marker behaviour. There were some suggestions that markers have become less invested, or apply less rigour to increase their throughput.

Workload

While many participants enjoyed marking, they acknowledged the challenge of balancing it with other commitments. Nevertheless, most remained dedicated, accepting that the marking period would be especially demanding.

Some participants faced difficulty securing time out of school, while others were frustrated by being put on hold from marking when team leaders were unavailable.

Markers meetings

Through interviews, concerns emerged regarding the move to online markers meetings. Many participants stated that they valued in-person markers meetings for networking, discussion, and informal support. Online meetings were seen as less interactive and engaging, but nonetheless more accessible and cost-effective.

Moreover, several participants expressed frustration with the perceived shift from interactive meetings to more passive briefings. Relatedly, some participants also regretted the move away from central marking, which was seen as providing better support and focus.

Standards and marking instructions

In interviews, there was little consensus on how standards should be set and communicated. Team leaders emphasised their role in ensuring consistent application once the standard has been set, while some markers wanted clearer explanations of standard-setting decisions at markers meetings. This top-down approach was sometimes perceived as dismissive of professional dialogue.

Most markers expressed confidence in their own understanding the standard, but concerns were raised about inconsistencies in the application of the standard between team leaders and across years. New markers also reported a steep learning curve.

Marking instructions were viewed by some as clear and comprehensive, but other participants reported that they were too vague. Moreover, several participants noted that

clarifications often emerged only in meetings, raising concerns that non-marker teachers may teach to outdated standards.

Support

Most marker survey respondents agreed that they felt adequately supported by their marking teams. However, interviews revealed mixed experiences: some valued their team leaders' support, while others felt isolated, struggled to get help, or said they would appreciate more discussion or explanation for decisions that had been made. New markers, in particular, wanted more training and guidance.

On the other hand, team leaders highlighted challenges with markers questioning the agreed standard or marking instructions, and felt there was more friction between markers and team leaders in recent years. They also expressed difficulties with managing both overconfident new markers and long-serving markers resistant to change.

Reasons for not marking

Those marker survey respondents who had chosen to stop marking mainly cited low pay, tax implications, and workload. Likewise, withdrawals or returns of marking allocations were often due to unexpected personal reasons, time pressures, school commitments, and issues with SQA processes.

Marker survey respondents believed that their colleagues chose not to mark mainly because of low pay and workload concerns.

Those who were non-markers also said that their main reasons for not marking were due to the pay and workload. Many also said they had applied to mark but were rejected or had not heard back.

Comparisons with marking for other awarding bodies

Of those marker survey respondents who had marked for other awarding bodies, more than half suggested that the financial rewards at SQA were worse.

However, other aspects of marking — such as communication, processes, and support — were generally thought to be similar between SQA and other awarding bodies.

Suggestions for improving recruitment and retention

The most frequently suggested improvement in increasing marker recruitment and retention was increasing pay.

For increased recruitment, participants also recommended better promotion of the CPD benefits of marking, especially to new teachers, and wider advertising, including through partners such as Education Scotland and GTCS.

To improve retention, participants called for greater recognition and appreciation of markers' efforts, better feedback, and more support for new markers to avoid disengagement.

Considerations

This research has found that NQ markers are committed and dedicated professionals who invest significant time and energy into ensuring rigorous and high-quality marking. In return, they derive a number of personal and professional benefits — most notably, an enhanced understanding of the standard. This contributes to improved teaching practice, impactful

continuing professional development (CPD), and wider benefits for learners and departments.

However, the overarching aim of this research was to identify how SQA can better support markers and improve their recruitment and retention. The following considerations are based on the areas of concern highlighted by the research.

By a considerable distance, the most prominent concern to emerge among markers was remuneration. While acknowledging the wider financial constraints in the Scottish public sector, SQA should, in the interests of fairness and sustainability, seek with the Scottish Government to increase marker pay in line with inflation, and ensure that marker pay is increased annually.

SQA should seek to ensure that all marking teams follow consistent, supportive processes and implement best practice. All markers should be informed and clear about where and when they can access support, their expected marking volumes, the standard to be applied, and likely waiting times if put on hold. Team leaders should be professional and approachable in their communications with markers.

Similarly, the purpose and expectations of markers meetings should be clarified. These should be as engaging and interactive as possible and involve professional dialogue where appropriate. Marking teams should be clear that the purpose of these meetings is to develop a shared understanding of the standard so that it can be applied accurately and consistently, not to re-interpret it. If questioned, the senior marking team should be clear about why specific decisions have been reached.

The organisation should assess whether current training and support are sufficient and explore opportunities to expand or improve these, particularly for those marking for the first time.

SQA should explore whether there is scope, within available resources, to expand feedback to markers. Suggestions include more detailed content in the key performance measures letter, and personalised one-to-one feedback for new markers.

SQA should consider working to further highlight to school leaders the benefits of having markers within their departments, including improvements to teaching and learning. This could help with both recruitment and ensuring existing markers are supported in being released from school.

Given the perceived CPD and networking benefits of being part of a marking team, SQA should consider working further with organisations such as GTCS and Education Scotland to highlight and promote the advantages of becoming a marker.

Also in terms of recruitment, SQA should produce case studies, videos and other online content to exemplify the experiences, expectations and benefits of marking.

To support markers and marking teams and their professionalism, SQA should consider further work to widely disseminate information about marking and grading processes. This should include information on the development of question papers and marking instructions, the recruitment of marking teams, standardisation, markers meetings, the marking process, marker check, grade boundary meetings, and finalisation. This will help foster understanding and trust in the marking process across the wider education system.

A theme emerged from the research suggesting that many markers prefer in-person markers meetings and central marking for reasons of networking, support and increased focus. Such arrangements may no longer be feasible, but SQA should consider publishing high-level cost comparisons for in-person and online events to contextualise decisions and explain the rationale for moving online.

Introduction

SQA recruits approximately 7,500 individual markers for NQs each year. However, in recent years, SQA has observed difficulties in the recruitment and retention of markers, including a decrease in the number of markers available for NQ across different subject areas and a high number of scripts returned to SQA unmarked.

Over the past few years, the Scottish education sector has gone through a period of challenges, born from the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis. Several important contextual factors that have developed from these challenges, such as an increasingly strained relationship between SQA and educators in recent years, and the increase of teacher salaries in 2023, may have contributed to this fall in marker numbers.

However, the reasons for this drop were, up until now, largely based on conjecture, or feedback from a small number of markers. As such, SQA sought to undertake a comprehensive review of educators' views to understand why this phenomenon was occurring.

This report presents the findings of the research SQA carried out between February and April 2025. The report explores a number of different topics such as the benefits of marking, the challenges associated with marking, the reasons for withdrawing from, or choosing not to partake in, marking, and a review of the process of marking from other awarding bodies. This report also offers improvements that SQA could make to increase recruitment and retention rates.

Methodology

Research aims and objectives

In light of SQA's continued difficulties with recruiting and retaining markers for NQ assessment, the broad aim of this research was to understand why SQA markers withdraw from marking and why eligible non-markers choose not to mark.

To understand the perspectives of markers and non-markers in relation to their experience or understanding of the marking process, the following research questions were formulated:

- ◆ What are markers' perspectives on and experiences of marking, particularly any challenges they face?
- ◆ Why do individuals choose not to mark, and why do some choose to stop marking?
- ◆ How can SQA better support markers?
- ◆ What changes can SQA make to improve marker recruitment and retention?
- ◆ How does the experience of marking for SQA compare with that of other awarding bodies?

Ethics

A Research Commissioning Form (RCF) was presented to the Senior Research Team (SRT) that outlined the proposed aims, design, analysis and dissemination of the research. While the risk of harm to participants was low, the research was designed to ensure that it was conducted safely and that participants were protected. This included ensuring that the research approach aligned the principles set out in SQA's Code of Research Practice (CoRP). All participants were over the age of 18, and the research did not specifically target vulnerable populations. Because of this, the research did not trigger a full ethical review, and the research was approved to be conducted by the SRT.

To ensure the research was being conducted ethically, participants were given detailed information about the research prior to taking part so they could give informed consent. Their participation was entirely voluntary, and they were made aware that they could stop their participation at any point during data collection. Interview participants could also choose to withdraw their data up to a week after the interview had been conducted. It was also emphasised to participants that their responses would be completely anonymous and that any information, such as locations, centres, names, or anecdotes that could identify themselves or others would not be published in the research outputs.

Research design and sampling

To address the research aims and questions, a mixed-methods study was conducted that was largely exploratory in nature. The research made use of several different research methods including: a survey to markers, followed up with one-to-one depth interviews with a selection of survey respondents; another survey to non-markers; and desk research into the marking practices of other awarding bodies. The purpose of using multiple methods was to build a comprehensive picture of the marking landscape from a range of stakeholders to ensure the issue was explored fully and to gather deeper insights than could be achieved using a single method.

The survey was designed by the Research and Evaluation team with input from Operations and Appointee Management colleagues. The survey contained a mixture of closed quantitative questions and open text questions.

As the answers to the research questions were largely unknown, this research used insights from participants to guide the design of consecutive research instruments. This also enabled participants to play a role in shaping the research. Open text questions were included in the survey to allow participants to give responses to questions that were not covered by the closed answer options. This provided insights when shaping the topic guides for interviews.

The interviews were designed to be semi-structured and the topic guide contained broad open questions and a number of prompts to allow the conversation to be co-constructed between the researcher and participant. This enabled participants to lead the discussion into areas that were of particular concern to them, and for interviewers to explore these areas in more depth. This also served to accommodate the diversity in experience of the sample, such as the length of time they had marked for, the roles they had in the marking team and the subjects they represented.

Research with markers

Survey sampling and recruitment

To minimise the risk of self-selection bias, NQ markers were randomly selected to take part in the survey. Every fourth marker who met the following criteria was invited to complete the survey:

- ◆ Had marked an NQ assessment for SQA in 2022, 2023, or 2024
- ◆ Had been graded an A or B¹
- ◆ Had not been withdrawn from marking by SQA in 2022, 2023, 2024

Those who had been 'C' markers² in any of their marking teams across any of the three years were not included in the sample. This was because C markers are not invited to mark in subsequent diets, and we could not ask about opting out of marking duties if we included these markers.

An invitation email was sent to a sample of 2,168 markers who met the above criteria. The email included information about the research and a link to the survey. Less than one per cent of participants said they had not undertaken NQ marking in one or more of the years 2022, 2023, and 2024 (and were therefore disqualified from the survey). Of the 2,163 markers contacted, 768 completed the survey resulting in a 36% response rate.

As discussed in the Respondent Profile chapter, survey respondents were found to be largely proportional to the number of markers per subject, giving greater confidence that the survey results could be generalised to the greater marker population in terms of subjects marked. However, data on other characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, disability status,

1 'A' markers are those who are considered to be marking to the accepted standard; 'B' markers are those who are marking to the standard but may at times be too harsh or lenient.
2 'C' markers are those who are not marking to standard and are showing leniency, severity or inconsistency.

retirement status and contracted employment hours were not collected, so it is unclear how representative the responses are in terms of these demographics.

Survey data collection

The survey was administered on an online survey software called SmartSurvey. It opened on 25 February 2025 and remained open for three weeks, closing on 14 March 2025. The sample was also sent a reminder email on 10 March 2025 to boost response rates.

Survey analysis

The survey dataset was downloaded from SmartSurvey and saved on a secure drive that was only accessible by Research and Evaluation staff. The quantitative data was cleaned and analysed in Microsoft Excel to produce simple, descriptive statistics.

Key topics and issues were identified by the research team through familiarisation with the open text responses in the dataset. An analytical coding framework was drawn up using the key themes and issues that had emerged through this familiarisation process. The open text responses were uploaded to NVivo where they were coded using this framework. This allowed all the data on a particular theme to be viewed together.

Interview sampling and recruitment

Survey respondents were asked to provide their contact information and availability if they would like to take part in a one-to-one interview about their experiences of marking for SQA. Two hundred and thirty-five respondents agreed to take part in an interview, allowing the research team to select participants to interview based on the subject they marked and their availability.

The qualitative aspect of this research aimed to gather a diverse range of views from markers. As such, the research aimed to focus on markers from a wide variety of subjects, with particular focus on large marking teams and those that had high marker withdrawal rates. The subjects with high marker withdrawal rates were Art and Design, Modern Studies, Business Management, Geography, and Physical Education. Subjects with large marking teams that were targeted were Biology, Drama, English, Health and Food Technology, History, Mathematics, Music, and Physics.

A selection of markers who had signed up to interview from the above subjects were invited between 12 March 2025 and 8 April 2025 to take part in an interview.

The email included a participant information form with detailed information about the research and a consent form. Participants who sent back the consent form or who emailed expressing their interest in taking part were sent a meeting invite on Microsoft Teams.

Interviews were carried out between 20 March 2025 and 9 April 2025.

Interview data collection

In-depth semi-structured interviews were used to gather rich data about the perspectives and experiences of markers on a one-to-one basis. All interviews took place on Microsoft Teams and ranged between 20 minutes and an hour. Seventeen interviews in total were completed.

With consent from participants, interviews were recorded and transcribed in Teams. Interviewers then checked and edited the transcripts by listening to the recordings to confirm

their accuracy. The transcripts were also anonymised to remove all names, centre names, and locations.

Recordings and transcripts were saved securely in a drive that was only accessible by Research and Evaluation staff.

Interview analysis

The research team read and re-read the transcripts to become familiar with the issues and perspectives raised in the interviews. Researchers then discussed the main themes and key issues that they had identified and used this to draw up another analytical coding framework.

The transcripts were then uploaded to NVivo where they were coded using the established coding framework. This allowed for the full range of perspectives to be viewed by theme, including where participants agreed or disagreed or offered unique points of view on an issue.

Research with non-markers

Survey sampling and recruitment

This survey aimed to gather the views of eligible individuals who had never marked for SQA. Due to the timing of the survey, which was sent out during the 2024–25 exam diet, researchers advertised the survey to potential respondents in SQA News. The article in SQA News provided potential respondents with information about the survey and a link to take part.

Participants self-selected themselves to take part, so the data collected from this survey could be impacted by self-selection bias — those who had particular views that they wanted to share with SQA may have been more motivated to complete the survey. As a result it is possible that these views are over-represented in the data compared to the wider population of markers, and care should be taken in generalising from these results.

Respondents were disqualified from the survey if they were not currently teaching an NQ subject or if they said they undertook NQ marking in 2022, 2023, or 2024.

Survey data collection

The survey opened on 6 May 2025 and closed on 28 May 2025. It was administered on SmartSurvey and received 557 responses.

Survey analysis

The survey dataset was downloaded from SmartSurvey and saved on a secure drive that was only accessible by Research and Evaluation staff. The quantitative data was cleaned and analysed in Microsoft Excel to produce simple, descriptive statistics.

Key topics and issues were identified by the research team through familiarisation with the open text responses in the dataset. The open text responses were uploaded to NVivo where they were coded by theme, allowing all the data on a singular theme to be viewed together.

Research into other awarding bodies

The desk research aimed to summarise the requirements to mark for other awarding bodies across the UK, as well as the training and support for markers provided by other awarding bodies. Headline statistics were also included from the 2022 Ofqual Survey of Examiners. The information was obtained via targeted web search and review of relevant awarding body websites.

As this information could be considered business sensitive, some awarding bodies did not fully publicise their pay rates for marking. Therefore, the information gathered was not uniform across all awarding bodies.

Boolean searches were conducted, with the relevant awarding body and the operator 'and'. Other keywords used in the Boolean searches were 'marking', 'pay', 'reward', 'training' and 'support'. Eight relevant web pages were found from five other awarding bodies. These were summarised by awarding body.

Limitations

As with any research there were a number of limitations with this work that should be considered when viewing the findings.

For both surveys, respondents selected themselves to take part. This means that the data produced through these surveys are not necessarily representative of the views of all SQA markers or non-markers. There is a risk that those who were particularly motivated to share their views with SQA are overrepresented in the data. Non-markers who were motivated to answer the survey may have had more of an interest in marking, so the views of those who had considered marking may be overrepresented while the views of those who had no interest in marking are underrepresented.

Due to the criteria used for respondents of the non-marker survey, some people who had fairly recent experience of marking for SQA, before 2022, took part in the survey. This means that the non-marker data also includes the views of a small number of past markers.

Although attempts were made to represent the views of markers from a wide range of subjects, we were unable to carry out interviews with markers from all subjects, so some subject-specific issues may have been missed from the analysis.

Data collection took place around a year after the previous marking period so experiences of marking may not have been fresh in participants' heads.

While markers who had been withdrawn from marking by SQA were not invited to participate in the survey, there appeared to be a small number of cases in the dataset that came from this group.

Respondent profiles

Marker survey and interviews

Marker survey respondents were asked which subjects they marked for. As shown in **Table 2** in the appendix, marker respondents came from 46 subjects, with the highest proportion from English (15%), Mathematics (9%) and History (7%). These figures generally correlated with the subjects with the highest number of markers, with 16% of all markers marking for English, 7% for Mathematics and 7% of History.

Markers from a range of different subjects were invited to take part in a one-to-one interview. Markers from subjects that had a larger marker team were targeted. Moreover, analysis of SQA data found that several subjects had particularly high withdrawal rates. As such, extra efforts were made by the research team to contact markers who had signed up to interview from large marking teams with high withdrawal rates. These were Art and Design, Modern Studies, Business Management, Geography, and Physical Education.

Seventeen markers took part in an interview about their experience of marking for SQA. **Table 1** shows the subjects that interview participants represented.

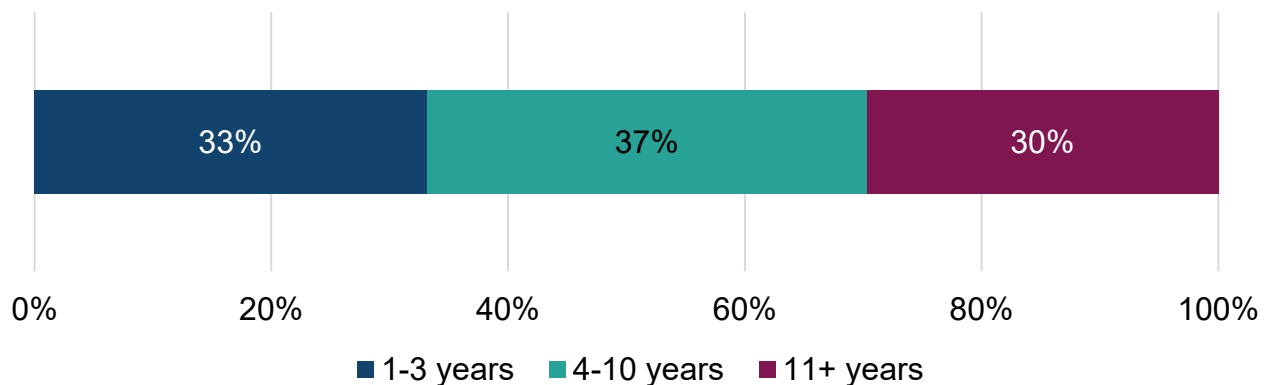
Table 1: Number of interview participants by subject marked

Subject	Number of interviews
Art and Design	2
Biology	1
Business Management	2
Drama	1
English	1
Geography	2
Health and Food Technology	1
History	1
Mathematics	1
Modern Studies	2
Music	1
Physical Education	1
Physics	1

Interview participants were also diverse in their experience, with some participants having marked for more than 30 years and some having marked for one year. Some participants were team leaders, principal assessors, or visiting assessors as well as being markers. Many interview participants also marked for multiple components and qualifications. To avoid potentially disclosing the identity of respondents, the breakdown of different participants' experience and roles has not been included in this report.

Marker survey respondents were asked how many years they had marked for SQA. As shown in **Figure 1**, 33% of respondents had marked for one to three years, 37% had marked for four to ten years and 30% had marked for eleven years or more.

Figure 1: How many years have you marked for SQA?



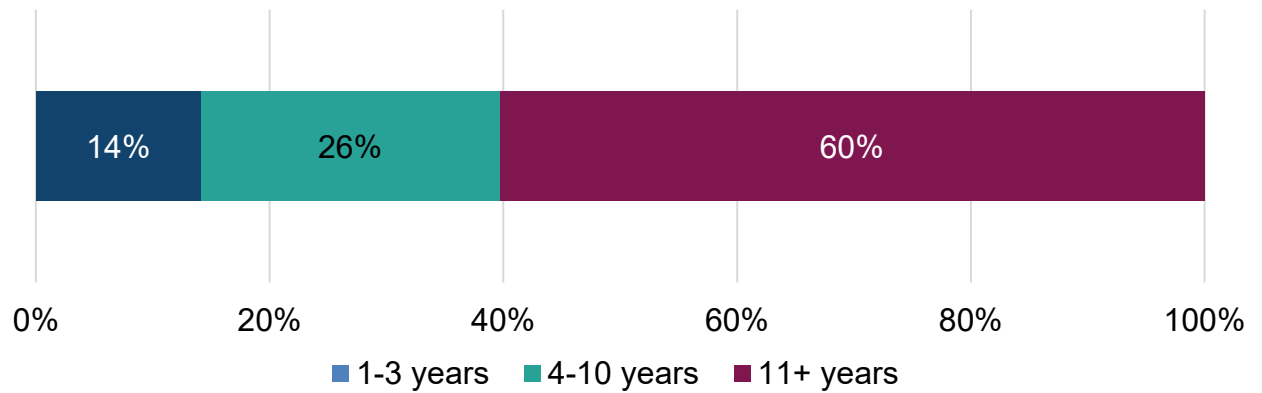
Base: 718 respondents.

Marker survey respondents were also asked if they had been a visiting assessor for SQA. Seven per cent of respondents had been a visiting assessor while 92% had not.

Non-marker survey

Data from the non-marker survey showed that 14% of respondents had been teaching for 1–3 years, 26% for 4–10 years, while the majority (60%) had taught for 11 years or more (Figure 2).

Figure 2: How long have you been a qualified teacher for? (Non-markers)



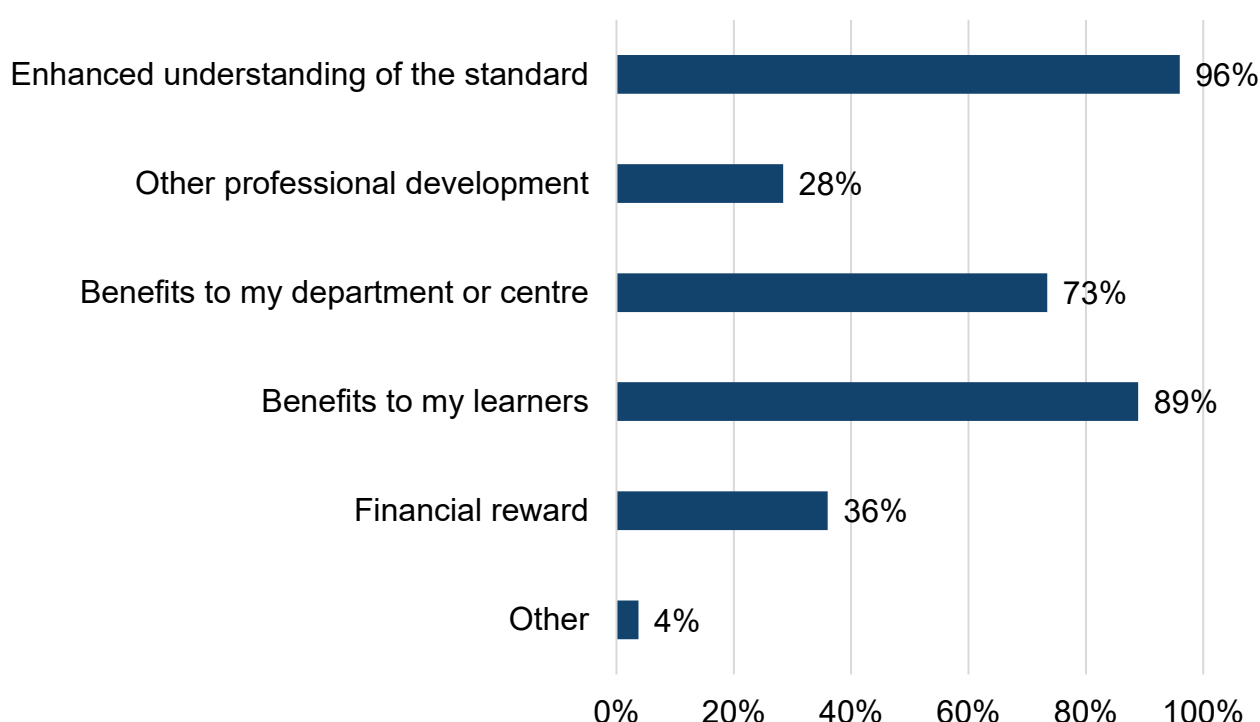
Base: 431 respondents.

Findings

Benefits of marking

Survey respondents were asked what they felt the main benefits of being an SQA marker were. As shown in **Figure 3**, almost all respondents (96%) said ‘enhanced understanding of the standard’, followed by 89% who said ‘benefits to my learners’, and 73% who said ‘benefits to my department or centre’. A smaller proportion of respondents said, ‘financial reward’ (36%) and ‘other professional development’ (28%). Four per cent of respondents selected ‘other’. Of those that left a comment explaining their answer, it was common for respondents to say that networking with colleagues in their subject area across Scotland was a benefit.

Figure 3: What do you think are the main benefits of being an SQA marker?



Base: 722 respondents.

Interview participants were asked what they thought the main benefits of marking were. The most common theme to emerge was that marking provided those involved with additional insight into the application of the national standard. This included relatively new teachers who wanted to develop and deepen their understanding of the national standard, but also more experienced teachers who felt it was important to maintain their professional practice.

A number of participants also mentioned that seeing scripts from centres across Scotland helped put their own learners and their own teaching into a wider context.

‘Yeah, it was understanding the national standards. That was the big, big drive.’

‘It’s easy to have an understanding of the standards but be blinded by your own context and your own learners ... Whereas when you go to the marking, you’re seeing a full range of absolutely everybody right across Scotland.’

Participants mentioned that an in-depth understanding of the national standard also brought benefits and gave confidence to their learners and centres. Indeed, a small number of interviewees suggested that they appreciated being the source of marking expertise within their department.

'[Having a marker in the department is] useful for kids in terms of helping them understand the process and what they need to do and [it's] also useful for colleagues in terms of hopefully giving them a bit more confidence in what the SQA actually does.'

'You know exactly how to go about answering those questions... You can then pass those skills that you've learned onto your candidates, which is so important because that's the only way you'll raise attainment.'

This related to the next-most prominent theme, which was that marking improved markers' teaching practice. More than one interviewee suggested that marking was the most impactful continuing professional development (CPD) that a teacher could undertake. The reasons for this included that marking increases teachers', and in turn learners', confidence; that it helps teachers tailor and focus their teaching; and that it improves understanding of the course.

'It improves your practice ... you cannot quantify how much it improves your practice.'

'It's the best way to understand like the process of what goes on and how the structure works and understanding the course content.'

A few participants noted that there are materials and resources available to all educators to develop their teaching practice in line with national standards. Nevertheless, they argued that the process of marking and the breadth and depth of material they engaged with as part of it surpassed other types of CPD.

Several interviewees suggested that a benefit of marking is the opportunity to network. While some participants mentioned the benefits of working with others during marking, the networking benefits were more commonly framed in terms of wider benefits to teaching practices and career and professional development. Networking benefits were deemed by some to be particularly important for educators in smaller centres or in lower uptake subjects.

'It's good to be in a room with other practitioners. And even before you get to the marking, there's obviously discussion about how you teach that level and how you teach different parts of it. So that networking part I think is really good, really positive.'

'It really, really lets you network with other colleagues and other subject areas as well. So, it kind of builds your profile.'

Related to this, a number of participants stated that several of the benefits of marking that they had identified were predicated on central marking or in-person meetings. There was concern, explored further later in this report, that a move to more online marking and fewer opportunities to meet other educators face-to-face may lessen the benefits of marking.

Nonetheless, a number of interviewees emphasised how much they enjoy marking and how valuable they find being part of a supportive and professional marking team. Marking was

deemed to be worthwhile in terms of markers' own development and job satisfaction, but also in terms of the benefits and rewards to learners of good quality and dedicated marking.

'I love being on the exam team ... I'm looking forward to the start of the procedures again this year. I'm looking forward to them. So, right from markers meeting on day one up to finalisation.'

'I've always enjoyed marking. I know that this will sound quite silly, but I get quite excited when I'm marking a kid's script and if I get an outstandingly good pupil, [I'm] so excited.'

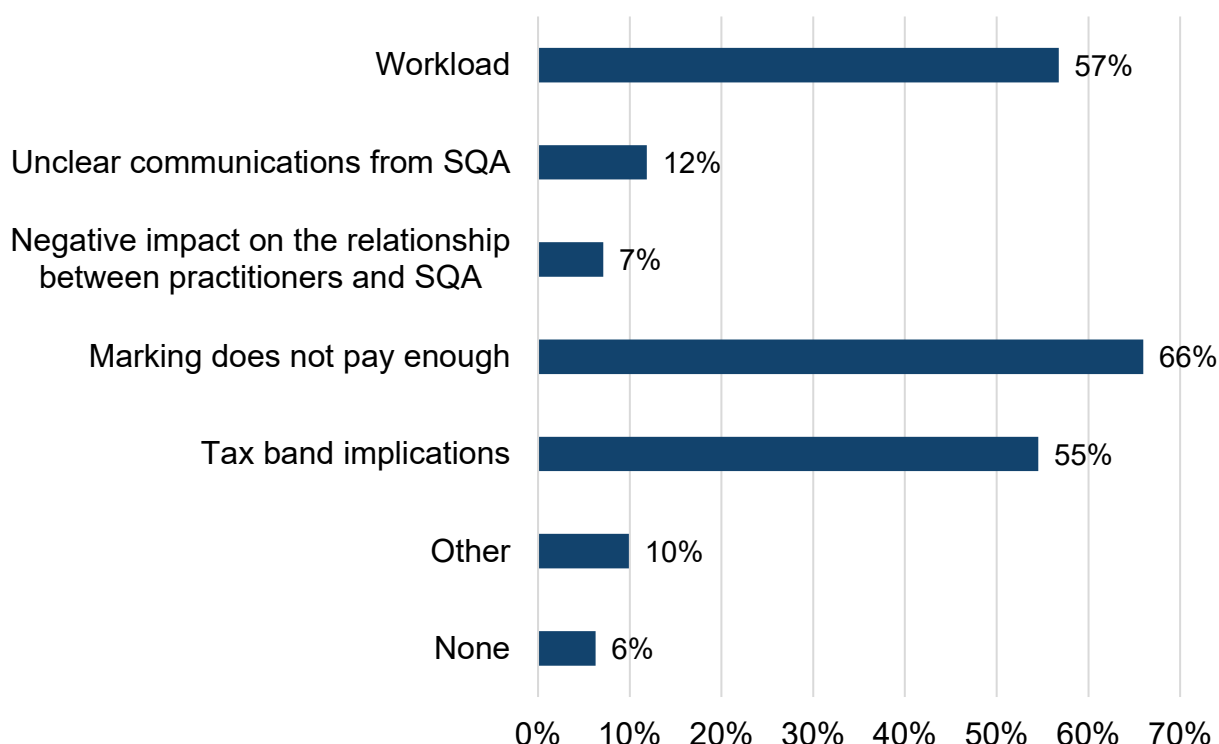
Only a couple of participants mentioned pay as a benefit of marking and, even then, it was referred to as 'pocket money' or a 'wee bonus'.

Challenges associated with marking

Marker survey respondents were asked what they thought were the main drawbacks to being an SQA marker. As shown in **Figure 4**, a majority of respondents said 'marking does not pay enough' (66%), 'workload' (57%) and 'tax band implications' (55%) were the main drawbacks. A much smaller proportion of respondents felt that 'unclear communications from SQA' (12%) and 'negative impact on the relationship between practitioners and SQA' (7%) were the main drawbacks, and just 6% of respondents felt there were no drawbacks.

Ten per cent of respondents opted for 'other'. Of those that left a comment explaining what they perceived the other drawbacks to be, common themes were difficulties with getting time out of school, stress, and inconsistencies with the standard.

Figure 4: What do you think are the main drawbacks to being an SQA marker?



Base: 717 respondents.

These challenges associated with marking, and similar issues raised by interview participants, are discussed in depth in this chapter. It should be borne in mind that, although many markers emphasised their enjoyment of marking and how much they feel they get out of it, this research, by definition, focuses on areas of concern.

Pay and expenses

Pay

Overwhelmingly, the biggest concern that participants identified with marking was pay. This theme was the most prevalent in the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the survey. As shown in the previous section, around two-thirds of marker survey respondents (66%) said the fact that marking does not pay enough was one of the main drawbacks of marking.

From 2013 to 2025, the hourly rate for marking undertaken in a marker's own time associated with central marking has increased by 6.05%. The hourly rate for at-home marking has increased by 6.11%. Over the same period, pay for an unpromoted teacher at the top of the pay scale has increased by 46.5%. Using the consumer price index (CPI), the cost of goods and services has increased by 38.1% since 2013. The retail price index (RPI) shows this increase to be 61.5%³.

³ The Bank of England uses the CPI to set the inflation target, but this does not include costs associated with home ownership such as mortgages, which the RPI does.

It was common for marker survey respondents to say that while they did not take part in marking for the money, they were considering withdrawing from marking due to the low pay. Around half of the marker survey respondents left an open-text comment around issues with pay, suggesting it was a prevalent concern. In these open-text responses, the key issues respondents perceived with pay were:

- ◆ per hour, it worked out at less than minimum wage
- ◆ it had not increased in line with inflation
- ◆ it was not appropriate for the level of expertise required

Teachers had not been given additional pay for marking activities completed in school hours (such as markers meetings), but they still had to spend extra unpaid time providing cover work for their missed classes

Any pay received for marking had been taxed at over 40% for full-time teachers:

‘Now that teachers are being taxed at 42%, if you are the top of the scale, there is not much of an incentive to mark when you are coming out with several hundred pounds less than you got a few years ago. It is also unfair that other makers who have not yet reached the top of the scale and doing exactly the same job as yourself are being paid significantly more.’

‘I think pay is a massive issue. By the summer term, a lot of teachers are exhausted and enjoy the break provided by exam leave. The pay just isn’t enough to tempt them!’

In interviews, the issues participants perceived with marking tended to not focus greatly on the pay. In fact, several markers explained that they did not mark for financial reward and the pay was just an extra bonus for them. However, while some said the pay did not concern them personally, they felt strongly that it put off potential markers from applying for available roles.

‘The money, I don’t think was ever like the main motivator for me. [...] I don’t really think about the money — it’s a nice wee bonus obviously, but I don’t think it’s enough money that it would be enough for me to, kind of, keep doing it solely for that.’

‘I don’t think that it’s super badly paid personally. Like, it’s not amazing. But I don’t think it’s a shocking amount of money. But I think that maybe, again, [it] would encourage more folk if there was going to be more money at the end of it. But I don’t think for me that is a motivating factor anyway. It’s more important I’m feeling like I’m gaining something professional out of it.’

Some markers said that they were happy with the amount they were paid, but these tended to be markers who were retired, worked part-time or were newer teachers, so they were not as impacted by the 42% taxation rate as others.

When interview participants did speak about pay, these generally reflected the themes illuminated in the marker survey. For example, several interview participants stated that their pay worked out at less than minimum wage per hour, although some said this was after tax and some said this was before tax.

'The biggest concern that I've heard from a marking point of view is the tax banding. You'll have heard about [it]. This is the fact that the additional payment is taking people over the tax banding and the money, the hourly or the per script amount that's paid to markers is essentially minimum wage once you take away the extra tax.'

'I've done the sums with a colleague last May and I think by the time we worked it out, when we've done our hours, we were earning, before tax and deductions, in the region of seven quid an hour. Well, number one, that's illegal, end of the day. You know, if you want it done in a certain amount of time, you pay us the hourly rate that it takes. If you want to pay us piece rate then that's great, but that needs to be calculated to work at minimum wage.'

The higher tax rate was an issue that was continually brought up by markers. In recent years, the salary scale of teachers in Scotland was raised as a result of strike action. At the time of writing, any income earned between £43,633 and £75,000 in Scotland is taxed at 42% (UK Government, 2025). This means that any teacher who has been working for three years or more on a full-time salary would find any income they made through marking taxed at 42% (EIS, 2025).

While some markers explained that the financial aspect was not the reason they marked, they nevertheless felt that the amount they received after tax was too little. There were others who felt that the difficulty and time required of marking was not reflected in their earnings after tax, and this made them want to stop marking in the future. One marker pointed out that they could earn more money doing takeaway deliveries, which they perceived as easier and less time-consuming.

'The pay is not great, and markers will say, 'We don't mark for the money'. But when you're on the highest tax bracket already, by the time you get your tax deductions, a pension contribution, depending on how long you've been with the SQA, it's very, very little, very little. And I think that's becoming an increasing turn-off for some markers.'

'I've never felt underpaid by SQA ever and, you know, it's always a bit of an honour to work for them, as well as, you know, getting that bit of remuneration but it's that thing, and I mean, I'm at that stage in my career [...] and when I saw what the tax man was taking away, I just got to the point where I thought, 'nah'.'

Additionally, some more experienced markers stated that the base pay rate had not risen with inflation, on top of being more highly taxed compared to previous years, which meant they had received less money than in previous years. For some markers, this made them feel undervalued or disrespected.

'I mean, it really isn't about getting paid properly for what you do because nothing pays you properly for what you do. I'm not expecting more money, but I'm not expecting less money.'

'The fact that it's not gone up for a few years, ie with inflation, it's gone down, or it's gone up by like 1%, just seems to be a bit insulting, if I can use that word. [...] I feel as if that were being to a certain extent taken advantage of.'

The low pay for marking was perceived by some participants to have an impact on marker behaviours. For example, participants explained that the impact of stagnant pay and

increased tax had caused some markers to withdraw, shifting more scripts onto remaining markers without increased pay. One team leader also felt markers were becoming more argumentative and they perceived that this behaviour was influenced by low morale caused by low pay. Moreover, there was a concern that the low pay per script encouraged markers to mark faster to earn more money, which could impact the rigour and quality of the marking.

There was also a perception among some participants that markers were expected to do a lot of unpaid work to prepare for marking. For example, some participants explained that while SQA paid schools for cover teachers while they attended marking meetings, markers still had to spend hours preparing cover work for their classes while they were out of school. Additionally, participants explained that the training they did for marking did not stop at markers meetings and they were expected to read over the notes taken at these meetings in their own time to prepare to mark. One participant explained that some marking team members got paid for quality assurance tasks as an additional expense while others were paid as part of a flat fee, which they said had changed from previous years.

Expenses

Several themes emerged from the research regarding expenses; however, this was not as prominent as the pay issue. Several marker survey respondents explained that the payment for food allowance had not increased for 20 years and no longer covered costs. Some survey respondents also felt that the food provided at marking meetings was of poor quality or not to their taste.

‘Often the food provision isn’t suitable, and we are paying for meals out of our own money to then be taxed and deducted on the claim.’

‘Increase pay per script, pay per hour and £20 meal allowance (central marking).
The meal allowance has not changed for 20 years!’

The same issue of food allowance was also highlighted by some participants in interviews. Interview participants also explained that as markers were being placed by SQA in hotels in more remote locations to save money, participants said they did not have the option to go somewhere cheaper for food so had to cover the cost of food themselves.

‘So, for £20 allowance for a meal [...] I used to, and a lot of people did, we'd get room service in the hotel, so I'm marking away and getting room service. I now can't get the sort of fish and chips and a prawn cocktail like you used to. There's a nice, straightforward meal because it doesn't fit in there, if there's a £5 tray charge or whatever. So, a lot of times you're not getting value for money for that.’

One participant also explained that the new system of getting reimbursed for costs incurred during marking was difficult and time-consuming to do and they felt it was designed to prevent markers from applying.

With regards to hotels being further away from central marking venues, some interview participants explained that they had to drive a long way to get to meetings or had been made to move to a different hotel during the marking period by SQA due to cheaper rates. Additionally, one participant said they had been put in different hotels from their colleagues, to save money, which meant that they felt they missed out on the collegiate atmosphere that they had found to be one of the benefits of marking.

'You're putting us in split accommodations to save ten, twenty, thirty pounds. You're making us check out one night to go and drive somewhere else because it doesn't fit the budget.'

While food allowances and issues with hotels were the recurring issues that emerged from the research, there were some other expenses that a minority of participants felt should also be covered by SQA. These were:

- ◆ technological equipment used to mark, such as computers
- ◆ home energy costs incurred during marking, such as electricity and wi-fi

On the other hand, some interview participants also expressed positive feelings towards SQA providing accommodation and meal expenses for marking events. One marker felt that the cost of providing accommodation and expenses for markers was too much and that SQA should think of a more efficient way of running marking events.

Marking workload

When participants were asked about the challenges associated with marking, several mentioned workload. Even those who emphasised their enjoyment of the process suggested that it was challenging to balance the demands of marking with other work and commitments. Some participants commented that balancing different demands had become more difficult with resources in centres become more squeezed in recent years.

'[It] can be quite challenging because you come home when you're knackered from a day at work already and then you've got to sit down and mark like 30 exams. So that's a pressure.'

'It is becoming so time-consuming when workload is already so increased in centres ... the sheer volume of work at times...'

Time taken to mark

Most interview participants suggested that they were committed to marking thoroughly and properly, and understood that this takes time. The benefits to their teaching practice, colleagues and learners were generally thought to outweigh the inconvenience and stresses of being extremely busy for the marking period.

'There isn't any way to get around that because the procedure should be lengthy. If you're doing a procedure correct and you're making sure the national standard has been met, there are going to be lengthy procedures.'

However, it was evident that experiences of marking were mixed. Part-time and retired practitioners tended to report that they found marking easier, saying that they had more time than full-time practitioners.

Participants explained that the time available to mark and the associated stress depended on the subject they marked and when it is scheduled in the exam timetable. For instance, some participants said that they found it easier than their peers due to the timing of the exam at the beginning of the timetable, or marking falling fully within the study leave period.

Being put on hold

Interview participants had varying views about being put on hold whilst marking. Many expressed frustrations at this occurrence, and felt that it interfered with the time they had set aside to mark. One marker who was a parent said that it was especially difficult as they had to carefully schedule their marking times around childcare responsibilities.

‘Like I say, if we schedule time to do something, we need to do it in that time ... we can't just drop our plans and sit for four hours and wait to be unlocked.’

‘I can imagine setting two or three hours aside of an evening, and if an hour and a half of that is waiting for your team leader to reply because you've been put on hold, then it kinda does leave a bit of a bitter taste...’

However, there were some participants who found the system reasonable and understood why it was in place, such as to ensure standards were being met and due to the competing responsibilities of team leaders. Some team leaders also explained that they explicitly communicated the times they would and would not be available so that markers could plan around this.

‘When you get into the process of marking and you have someone overseeing, you know, you have someone on point that you can contact. There certainly is support there. Obviously, you have time restrictions because ... you know, they're teaching too, and there might be delays in getting feedback. And it means that your marking is on hold and stuff like that, which is not ideal, but obviously it's the way it has to be.’

‘You couldn't communicate with anybody all these years ago, you know, if there was a problem in the marking, there was no hotline to phone up. There was no team leader to speak with if there was an immediate problem. [...] Whereas now, that very seldom arises. And if it does arise, as I said, you've got a team leader in front of you.’

Some participants had developed strategies to enable them to continue marking or speed up the process of being taken off hold. For example, working on different paper while on hold, or considering the script that had placed them on hold while they waited for the team leader to release them.

Getting time out of school

Issues with getting time out of school to attend marking meetings were brought up in the survey data. However, when discussing getting time out of school to mark, many interview participants suggested that senior staff in their school were supportive and could see the benefit for both learners and staff of having markers within their departments. As the interview sample focused on current markers, it was likely they were not the group impacted by this issue.

‘My school's amazing. I can't complain. My school is so supportive [...] so our headteacher's very happy for us to be involved. She understands the benefits of it. She sees the benefits in our attainment. She sees the benefits in our understanding of the courses that we're teaching.’

That being said, senior staff being supportive was not universal to all the markers who were interviewed. Participants understood the issues that schools and senior managers faced, but

also felt that the knowledge gained and brought back to schools through marking was worth the difficulties of facilitating their absence. Other participants mentioned that while they were still questioned by school leaders for missing classes, marking events being held over weekends was helpful in getting time out of school.

‘No difficulties at all. The school is quite understanding. And because it's during study leave generally then it's not like — it's quite easy to arrange cover because it's a lot less cover to actually be arranged.’

‘Luckily, it's mostly weekends or there's a few holiday Mondays, which is fine ... So, there is a bit of pressure — understandable — from management saying, “Right, why you're doing so many days?” ... I feel like I don't abuse it in school and the school benefits from that. And, as I say, that's just because there's fewer and fewer days that these things are happening, [it's] an easier sale for me to say, “Yes, it's two days less than last year”.’

Standards and marking instructions

Standards

The data gathered from interview participants on the topic of standards presented a general lack of consensus on how the standard should be set and communicated to markers. There appeared to be a difference of opinion between those participants who were markers and participants who were team leaders. According to team leaders, the standard is established prior to marking by principal assessors and team leaders, often based on group consensus or, if necessary, voting. Team leaders explained that their role was to ensure that the standard was applied uniformly across all markers, rather than to debate or reinterpret it.

‘Sometimes it does come down to a vote ... and [I] have seen it occasionally been 13 to 12. ... But I think the problem is then when it comes to team leaders passing that on, it's “This is a standard; you're not allowed to question it”.’

However, many markers expressed a desire to better understand the rationale behind those standard-setting decisions. They felt that if they could grasp why a particular mark had or had not been awarded, they would be able to apply the standard more confidently and consistently. The absence of clear explanations in some marking teams contributed to a perception that the process was overly top-down and at times dismissive of professional dialogue.

These two contrasting points of view were recurring among markers and team leaders, and a lack of clear understanding about the processes and purpose of standard-setting was perhaps at the centre of these frustrations.

‘I think a lot of History markers feel like they [team leaders] are not always very good at explaining why they've made the decisions that they have done. Like for example in the markers meeting this year, our team leader in our small little group... somebody queried “Why did this kid get it and why this kid not get it?” and that team leader, who's obviously an experienced marker, as a team leader was like, “I'd disagree if that was up to me. I would give it. However, at the markers meeting, there's a big, long hour-long debate and we've agreed as a team that it does not get the mark.” And people were sort of like, but why? And she was like, “Like I say, the SQA said it doesn't get the mark, so it doesn't get the mark”.’

'I actually said "I have done this work last night. I don't understand where I'm going wrong with what your interpretation of what I'm doing and my interpretation. Can you explain it to me?" And they couldn't explain it to me. So, then I was getting frustrated. That bit was ... was quite difficult, was quite challenging.'

A recurring theme was inconsistency in how the standard was applied in a number of different ways. Participants said there was variation in how different team leaders said the standard should be applied, between different papers for the same level, and across different years for the same qualification. For example, one participant noted that a valid answer one year might not be accepted the next, even if the wording was identical. These inconsistencies, they suggested, undermined the confidence in the fairness and stability of SQA's qualifications.

'What has actually happened is two papers later ... a candidate almost saying the exact same thing, and that has been given a mark, and it wasn't ... last year, maybe? Like two years ago, one of the team leaders did actually apologise and say, "Yeah, actually I know this is inconsistent, but this is just the way we're running it. Just do your best".'

'Overall, there's a lot of good, but I do think there's times where I think everybody in History feels like they say one thing in one paper, and then you sort of apply that to the next paper and you sort of feel that the standard's changed a little bit.'

Some markers suggested that when they felt that clear mistakes in the set standard were identified, there were limited processes in place to escalate or resolve the issue. They felt that if the standard was found to be flawed or inconsistent, those in leadership positions should acknowledge and address the issue. This sentiment was tied to a broader desire for greater accountability and openness within the marking process.

Despite the difficulties expressed, markers generally reported confidence in their own understanding of the standard, with some saying they felt reasonably confident and others feeling very confident. Markers meetings were generally seen as having influenced this level of confidence, with many participants stating that the meetings helped to clarify the standard and provided useful insights through discussion and comparison of real-life examples. Some participants found the strictness of the markers meetings beneficial, believing it promoted consistency and rigour.

'I was really clear about what the standards were [...] I think we were in a strong place to do that, and I think that is largely due to the work that myself and other colleagues had done with SQA. You know, in our centre we had a really strong understanding of what was expected.'

'There were certain rules that they were quite strict on like no mobile phones on the marking floor, no kind of talking to your colleagues about the marks and they were pretty strict on enforcing those. And I thought that that was a really positive thing. And as a teacher, it gave me a lot of confidence going back to my centre that, you know, things would be done properly, and things were being done fairly and that these consistent rules were being followed.'

Marking instructions

Many markers described the marking instructions as clear, comprehensive, and well-structured, noting that there was always someone available to consult if any uncertainties

arose. Several participants also appreciated the way the instructions were explained during markers meetings, saying these sessions helped to clarify expectations and build their confidence in applying the standards. Others felt that in more subjective subjects the instructions were as clear as they could be, and that they were open enough for nuances to be applied.

'I think they're excellent, the MIs [marking instructions] and the CORs [common observed responses]. I think they're really, really well set out and there's must be a lot of hard work for them going through that and selecting CORs and things to go in. And if you do get one, which you can't see how to mark on the scheme, you look at the generic, you look at the CORs. If you still can't do it, you've got a team leader you can go to.'

'The marking instructions are clear in the sense I think they're written as well as they can be, but I think that sometimes they're trying to reduce sometimes quite kind of quite academic ... into like a sentence. And so ... the marking instructions themselves don't always cover everything, but I don't think that they could cover everything, so I think they're sufficient.'

Others, however, found the marking instructions less straightforward and overly vague, resulting in the need for repeated clarification by team leaders. The presence of ambiguous phrases in marking instructions, such as 'or any other suitable response', divided opinion. Some markers, including team leaders, found this openness helpful, as they felt it allowed more flexibility in awarding marks and better recognised the variety of valid learner responses. Others found it too vague, saying it introduced too much subjectivity and uncertainty into their marking decisions.

'They can be incredibly vague, but then when you interpret your way ... it's wrong. Do you know what I mean? It's just, "Tell us then". They don't. The classic line that they put on everything is "Accept any other suitable response".'

'No answer's black and white. And I think that's when markers are struggling because they want the kids just to get that ticky box answer. But actually, we're never going to penalise a young person that's written in a different format. So, they have to understand that [...] there's multiple ways these young people can meet the assessment standard and they have to be upscaled.'

Participants noted a clear distinction between the marking instructions available to teachers and those presented to markers at official meetings. Several commented that the materials accessible via the SQA website were limited, and that much of the key information only emerged during markers meetings, where annotations or clarifications were often added. This contributed to a perception that markers meetings provided a deeper and more useful interpretation of the instructions than the information that is publicly available for teaching purposes.

'I think the marking instructions gives a good basic sort of outline that you can refer back to, but the markers meeting sort of gives all the bulk of it.'

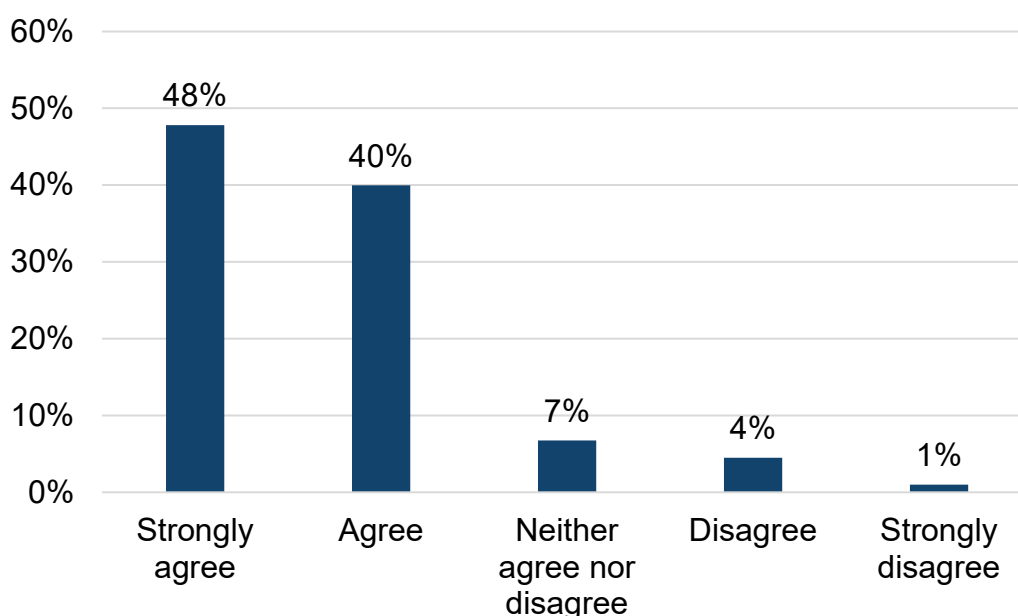
'They absolutely did thoroughly go through the mark scheme [...] for, I think, an hour and you made the adjustments to your mark scheme. It was very, very helpful. It was good. It was well paced. And the notes they gave you were really, really needed throughout the rest of the marking process. It was the most valuable one hour.'

This led to a concern among some that teachers might unknowingly teach from a different version of the standard than is the one ultimately used in marking. A recurring frustration was the perception that teachers taught content according to the official marking instructions, only for the criteria to shift at the markers meetings. Markers felt this could disadvantage learners, as their responses in assessments might not fully align with the final marking criteria.

Support from marking team

Marker survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that they received the support they required from their own marking team, such as principal assessors and team leaders. As shown in **Figure 5**, a strong majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they received the support they required, with 88% of survey respondents choosing either strongly agree or agree. In contrast 7% of respondents said they neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% of respondents said they disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 5: To what extent do you agree that you received the support you required from your own marking team?



Base: 713 respondents.

Interview participants discussed their experiences of being part of a marking team. Despite the strong levels of agreement among survey respondents that they received the support they required from their marking team, a theme that emerged from interviews was a friction between markers and team leaders in recent years. It appeared that this was led, in part, by a general disagreement among the two groups on the purpose of markers meetings and how to apply the standard. There is more analysis of this in the [markers meetings](#) section.

Views on team leaders

In interviews, markers' views on, and experiences with, their marking team leaders were mixed. While some participants described their team leaders as responsive and supportive, others felt that they were more remote or aloof. Moreover, some interviewees felt that their marking team's culture had changed over time.

Those markers who were appreciative of their marking team leaders felt that they were well supported and could reach out for help when they needed it.

'I've found my team leaders to be really excellent. Yeah, very supportive, very approachable.'

'Once you're in the period of marking, your team leader is readily available. All the team leaders I've had have given really clear indication of when they'll be online, of when they will be offline for any length of time and why and what to expect, what sort of hours they keep. And I find that they check in with you quite regularly.'

Those markers who were less positive about their team leaders suggested that it could be challenging to get support or answers when questioning why a decision had been made and that there was little scope for discussion. Others expressed feelings of isolation in the 'toxic' environment that had developed in marking teams.

'I would be asking for help, and I would find that I would be told ... "go and apply the marking instructions". And then if they disagreed my decision, they would come back at me.'

'It's just "do what you're told". Do what you're told, get through your papers. Do what you're told.'

'There is a definite "them and us" kind of culture.'

'It's horribly toxic. It's very cliquey if you're not in with the gang, as it were. You don't find nowt out, you know what I mean?'

Some criticisms of team leaders were related to a perceived change in markers meetings, where some participants felt that the purpose of these was now solely to transmit information rather than provide a forum for a discussion on standards. This issue is discussed in more detail later in this report. On the other hand, other participants suggested that their marking team had become more supportive over time, stating that it was now easier to communicate with and get guidance from a team leader than ever before.

Furthermore, while some participants thought that support from their team leader was easier to access in a face-to-face environment, others suggested that central marking, and the presence of the whole marking team, could be more intimidating when team leaders fed back on any potential issues with marking.

Views of team leaders

Those participants who were team leaders also shared their experiences of supporting marking teams. Some team leaders discussed the challenges of managing markers, such as markers being hostile towards leaders when questioning decision-marking. One participant observed that this attitude towards team leaders had developed in the years following the pandemic.

'I'm certainly not in the job to take abuse from a marker because [they don't] meet the national standard. And I think there maybe needs to be a bit of a stronger approach to markers.'

'But they're becoming increasingly, increasingly difficult ... I've noticed maybe over the last two years since post-COVID ... that markers ... are less forgiving to

their team leaders. They're becoming a little bit more clipped to put it nicely, and a little bit more forceful and they're demanding of your time.'

One participant mentioned that they thought new markers were at times overly confident. Another team leader thought that the requirement for higher numbers of markers in recent years meant that quality of new markers had suffered. On the other hand, another team leader thought that markers who had been marking for some years could be unwilling to accept new changes.

'But you've got all these very, very new young teachers coming in ... They are very confident and almost to the point where they don't look for the advice and help ... [One] person came back to me more than once, "Well, I disagree with your decision". And yet I'm a team leader. I'm applying the MIs as part of the team. You don't get a choice as to whether or not you disagree with my decision.'

'People who've been doing it for a while who've got stuck in their ways and are not willing to change.'

Support for markers

A few participants described how nerve-racking and intense marking for the first time could be. Some markers struggled with confidence and questioned whether they were marking to standard. Others felt that their teaching abilities were being judged or questioned through their marking, leading to anxiety. One interviewee found the process quite isolating.

'Am I doing a good enough job? Am I getting it right? Because it's a child's... there's no sort of practice run, that's somebody's grade ... you know?'

'So, two years ago I was a brand-new marker, and I was super nervous. They went through it [training] really, really quickly ... It can be quite daunting because you don't want to make mistakes, but mistakes are obviously going to happen if you're just new into marking.'

Some participants felt that they would have benefited from more support from their marking team for further discussion and feedback until they felt completely confident. However, some participants did note that their confidence grew as they became more experienced and, for some, their team leaders were a great support. A few participants also stated that getting appropriate support and actionable feedback was easier at in-person marking events.

The issue of marking feedback — or the lack of it — was also raised as an issue by some participants. While for some markers, this was a perceived lack of contact or support from their marking team as they went through the marking process, for others, there was a sense of frustration that markers do not receive more detailed (or timely) information on their overall marking performance. These participants thought that more detailed feedback on their performance could support improved practice in the future.

'They could improve the feedback by actually sort of like breaking it down a bit more and having a follow up conversation.'

'It's a bit basic that you just get a letter saying you've passed your KPIs [key performance indicators]. Just a letter that comes like three or four months later.'

On a similar note, several participants felt that there was scope for more training for markers, particularly new ones. Some felt that the short time frame given to train markers each year was a root cause of the retention issues SQA was facing, as it led to new markers feeling uncertain and overwhelmed. One participant suggested that new markers should receive extra training in addition to the regular training time given to all markers each year.

‘We’re trying to train them in about four, four and a half hours and it’s not enough. It really isn’t enough ... I think that’s why we end up with our markers leaving feeling, especially for the first time, not at all confident because they’ve not had enough time.’

‘There might be an option for them to do a sort of extra half a day for the new people ... I think it could be a way for them to help new markers feel more confident because I do know of other new markers who have started and then not come back ... because they felt a little overwhelmed or they felt that they weren’t doing a good job.’

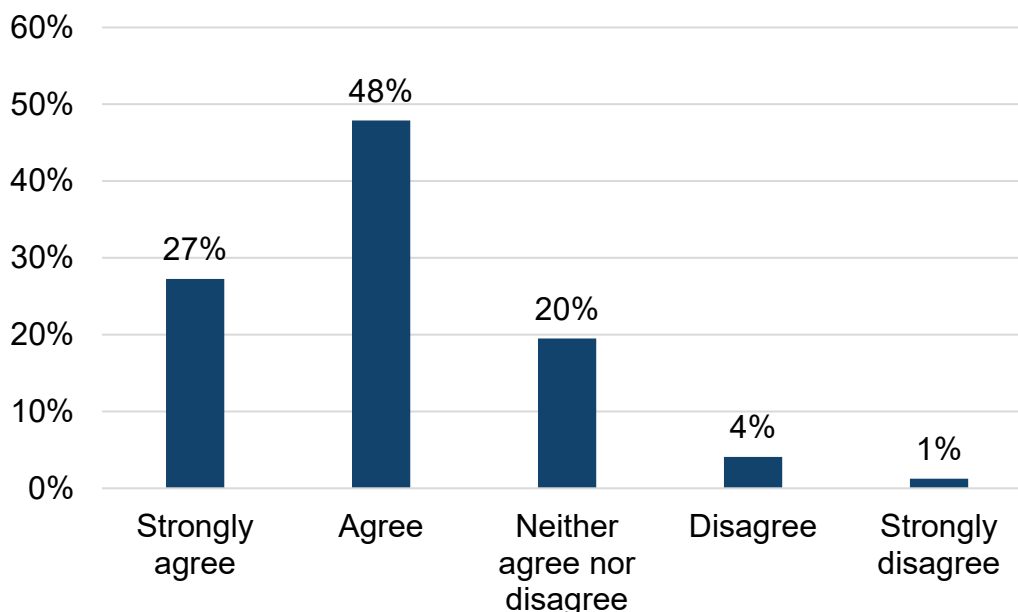
However, a few participants noted that online training of markers compared poorly to face-to-face training in the amount of support and feedback that markers received. Others recognised that finding capacity to increase marker training time would be challenging. Nonetheless, one participant suggested that more resources dedicated to training would mean savings elsewhere.

‘But after having gone through the appeals process last year, I’m like, “This is such a waste of money. Could this money not go into training our markers?”’

Support from SQA

Marker survey respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that they received the support they required from SQA. The vast majority of respondents expressed agreement that they had received the support they required from SQA, with 75% of respondents opting for agree or strongly agree. Twenty per cent of respondents said they neither agreed nor disagreed and 5% said they disagreed or strongly disagreed. **(Figure 6)**

Figure 6 To what extent do you agree that you received the support you required from SQA?



Base: 712 respondents.

Interview participants were also asked about support from SQA. There were relatively few comments on this area as participants generally felt they had limited contact with SQA throughout the marking process. Most suggested that they were satisfied with this approach.

‘I think it's just the right amount of communication. You don't tend to want too much coming at you prior to it. Stuff gets sent. Just confirming things in advance.’

However, a couple of interviewees thought that there was more scope for communication from SQA. One suggested that all markers should get an email at the end of the process pulling together information such as how many scripts were marked and where grade boundaries ended up being set.

‘People quite like numbers and facts, don't they? You know, if you've put all that time and effort into marking ... Just a wee sort of ping out to all the markers as a kind of follow up of ‘You've done this, here's how it turned out’. It would be quite nice to be able to feed that back to your department.’

Likewise, another participant thought that when markers are being re-contracted, SQA could give more feedback on their performance the previous year, particularly if a marker has declined to mark again.

‘If somebody had phoned me and maybe talked me through them [key performance indicators] and ... said “Listen, you were fine” ... If there was a sort of option for new people to have a little bit more of an in-depth feedback and encouragement to return.’

Finally on support from SQA, one participant who had reported an issue within their marking team felt that there was not enough communication from SQA and that it had failed in its duty of care.

Markers meetings

In interview, participants were asked about their experiences of markers meetings. The conversations on the features and style of markers meetings very often focused on their online nature, and this led on to some discussions about online marking compared to in-person central marking.

Online markers meetings

While a few participants did acknowledge the expense of in-person markers meetings, there was nevertheless a feeling expressed by several that such meetings had been beneficial for networking, had provided a forum for discussion, and had offered opportunities for informal feedback and support. By contrast, participants thought that online markers meetings could be less stimulating than face-to-face events and offered fewer opportunities for interaction.

‘It's just really dry ... As a teacher, you would never read to a class for four hours via Teams and expect them to stay engaged.’

‘It was the networking issue. It was being able to face-to-face talk to people, even when you were on the digital marking system, but you still had your physical markers meeting. It was actually physically attending it and being in the same room as people. So, you could do a couple of practice scripts all together and get a feel for it, whereas now you're just on your own. You know, it's just ... it kind of sucked the life out of that bit of it.’

One participant who was critical of the nature of online markers meetings suggested that they should focus only on questions that are likely to be challenging to mark.

A couple of participants also thought that even in the breakout rooms after the main information session, the dynamic was still very much of being talked at rather than interaction.

One participant who was a team leader suggested that while they thought the markers meetings were very useful, markers were not as committed to them when they are online. They noted that markers would refuse to turn their cameras on or would schedule other appointments at the same time.

However, some interviewees did make a point of saying that markers meetings do work online — even if they are slightly less effective at facilitating relationships — and that they are more cost effective and are easier to access for those who do not live in the central belt.

‘I think the markers meetings are great online and the different team leaders whom I've had have been very good.’

‘It's not quite the same as doing it in person [but] ... I understand the financial pressure. So, I don't necessarily have a problem with it being an online meeting.’

‘I think the virtual aspect of it is a lot easier. It saves the travel.’

One participant who valued online markers meetings did, however, suggest that markers should be paired with their own team leader in that meeting so that relationship-building could begin as soon as possible.

Despite the stated concerns about online markers meetings, a couple of participants emphasised how supportive their marking team was and that they were encouraged to seek support if necessary. Moreover, a few interview participants mentioned that, despite feeling nervous and uncertain about marking, they did feel prepared to start marking by the end of their markers meeting.

Changing nature of markers meetings

Several interviewees highlighted what they perceived as a move from markers meetings to markers briefings. Along with the move away from in-person events, they felt that meetings had become less about interaction and discussion and more about the principal assessor and team leaders imparting information.

‘It's changing from a markers meeting to a markers briefing where we are told what the marking scheme is. No sort of discussion whatsoever.’

‘Now, you're just... you're just a number. Just go and do what you're told.’

One participant suggested that this new briefing approach meant that there was no longer a requirement for a markers meeting.

‘You're not having a meeting; you're just being told what to do ... It's just unnecessary. It doesn't need to be three hours of my life sitting in front of the laptop on a Teams call listening to somebody reading it off a bit of paper ... It's not as if we're actually discussing things and agreeing a way forward.’

Other participants expressed frustration that their concerns about marking instructions were not taken on board at these meetings, resulting, on occasion, in perceived issues with what was being accepted. Some felt that, where different views were expressed, explanations of final decisions on the standard from the senior marking team were not clear enough.

‘[Previously] we would talk about it, and we would all agree what we were accepting.’

‘I know at markers meetings it has to be a definitive standard that's given. But there also has to be a really clear rationale and a really well-justified explanation and a consistency, and I don't think that's been happening.’

One interview participant said that they understood the challenges of agreeing a standard with the whole marking team but thought that there does still need to be scope for some discussion or challenge in the markers meeting.

‘The culture is “We're the guys that decided on this and you're the guys that are going to be implementing it” ... There's no way you could probably sit down and create a marking standard with 200 people sat around a room. But I think if there's a glaring error that lots of people are seeing, I think you have to be big enough to turn around and say, “Oh, didn't spot that. We're going to change that”.’

A couple of participants felt that the more hierarchical approach to markers meetings affected their desire to remain a marker.

'[I felt] completely undervalued and not wanted. There's no engagement. There's nothing to make you want to do it again.'

Loss of central marking

Discussion on the nature of markers meetings led some participants to discuss and express disappointment with the move away from central marking for their marking team.

This was framed by some interviewees in terms of perceptions of superior support provided through central marking. The supportive aspects of central marking were deemed to be not only from the senior marking team, but from other markers at the event.

'The support's just readily available, none of this logging on, logging off.'

'To improve the experience of the markers, being a new marker, central marking is perfect.'

'If you've got like an exam paper in front of you and somebody next [to you], you can just point to it and go, "I don't quite get this bit". And that's just a lot easier. Whereas trying to explain a bit that you don't get [in an email] can be quite hard to do, I think.'

'One of the big things that was always appealing about marking for me was networking. And you've removed that completely from the equation by making it all online.'

Others suggested that focus was improved through central, rather than home, marking.

'But it's that level of focus, we don't get that after school. You know, when you go home, and you've got your life, and you've got your laptop and your kitchen table ... you don't have the same focus or rigour.'

'I think there's a real sense that they [markers] enjoy central marking, really getting stuck in and been having that privilege of focus, which we don't get at school ... and they're willing to give a weekend of their time to just focus, heads down marking.'

One marker queried why some marking teams remain central marking while others have had to move away from that.

However, despite the prevalent concerns about the loss of central marking, there were a couple of participants who criticised central marking on the basis of logistics and said that they found marking at home to be more conducive to a work-life balance.

'[With central marking] you're asking markers to be away from their families, their children for like a long period of time. And that doesn't always work when it comes to, eg, childcare arrangements, actually wanting to spend time with your children.'

Subject-specific analysis

As discussed in the Respondent Profile chapter, there were several larger-scale marking teams that had particularly high withdrawal rates between 2022 and 2024 compared to other large marking teams.

Art and Design

Business Management

Geography

Modern Studies

Physical Education

To understand why these subjects may have higher withdrawal rates, we analysed the marker survey and interview data by subject area to identify specific issues. This section notes where themes from specific subjects diverge from marker respondents as a whole. Any statistical or qualitative findings that are not mentioned can be assumed to be in line with all marker respondents. It should be noted that the analysis by subject is based on the views of a small number of markers, so readers should be wary when generalising these findings to the wider marker population for these subjects.

Art and Design

Overall, the most common response to the question 'Why have you chosen not to mark again?' among all marker survey respondents was 'Marking does not pay enough' at 61%. Among Art and Design respondents, however, the most common response was 'Workload', with 80% of these respondents opting for this.

In the qualitative data, Art and Design respondents said that central marking was a tiring experience that lasted several days, and that markers were often asked to stay late due to the amount of marking to get through, and that their scheduled breaks were cut short at times. It was also said that central marking was a big commitment for Art and Design, and that markers with younger children were put off.

'So, we have historically always been four days and towards the end there can be a little bit of pressure in terms of "We're not going to make this, you need to speed up. We're going to ask you to stay late tonight", which obviously you're financially compensated for.'

In the marker survey, the majority of Art and Design survey respondents who withdrew said it was for personal reasons. However, the impact of these personal reasons may have been compounded by the high workload experienced by these markers, causing them to withdraw.

Another theme that reoccurred among Art and Design participants was that the subjectivity of the paper or folio itself meant that they often disagreed with marking criteria or felt that the standard they were asked to apply was inconsistent. In particular, participants said that they felt the marking criteria was too strict.

'It's a great experience but the sheer physicality and time spent marking, especially as it's a subjective area, can lead to variations of standards.'

'I think one of the things in Art and Design, particularly that people really struggle with, is the ... Design portfolio. For whatever reason, every year ... everybody I

...speak to cannot seem to understand why they have got the design marks that they've got, and quite often they're a lot lower than they expected.'

Business Management

Analysis of the Business Management data did not reveal any themes that diverged from the issues already discussed in the rest of this report for markers as a whole. However, there were some themes that, although present among respondents from a wide variety of subjects, were particularly prevalent among Business Management participants.

While the majority (80%) of Business Management marker survey respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that they received the support they required from their own marking team, and just 3% saying they disagreed or strongly disagreed, this was slightly less than the average when compared to all respondents. Eighty-six per cent of all marker respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that they received the support they required from their marking team.

In the qualitative data, several Business Management participants described the workload required of markers as an issue, saying that the turnaround time was very tight due to the quantity of scripts, and that a longer marking period was needed. One marker explained that they had dropped out of marking due to the exhaustion of marking multiple papers and levels. Other Business Management markers described having their allocation taken away from them by those who marked more quickly, resulting in them losing money.

'Exhaustion — I am marking N5 and Higher for both QP [question paper] and assignment. By the end I had stopped caring and it affected my marking so made the decision to stop.'

'Making the marking process more manageable by reducing individual workloads could encourage more applicants.'

'I find the allocation of marking I have been given being taken away with still five days to go till the deadline very demotivating — especially as one gets faster at marking the more one does. I also think the deadline for marking should be extended by a week. Both I think would improve the retention of markers.'

A minority of participants described the markers meetings as a particularly challenging environment, using language such as 'toxic' to describe them. This atmosphere was perceived to be due to team leaders enforcing a standard that these markers disagreed with and allowing no room for discussion.

'Be more open to criticism. Markers meetings are like communist rallies where no dissent is allowed. Feedback on scripts when you have been locked out. If you don't consent and tell the team leader they are correct they don't let you back in. This is even when the point is debatable and they know it is, but just because the marking team has said it is or isn't a mark you have to accept it.'

Geography

There were comments from a minority of Geography participants regarding perceived different standards in National 5 and Higher. This appeared to be a point of confusion, particularly around why a mark would be awarded for specific wording at Higher but not

allowed at National 5. It was perceived by some that it was more difficult to attribute marks to learners at National 5 than Higher.

‘Bizarrely, actually, it’s easier to get marks at Higher than it is to get at National 5 ... so much so as I still end up, sometimes, telling my kids that, like, Higher is much more straightforward than National 5 is. And I think National 5 Geography difficulties sits higher than the Higher standard, like they’re probably closer together. So I think it can certainly impact in schools and impact on learners where the standard is quite different, despite the fact of some of the things looked very similar.’

Modern Studies

The most common response to the marker survey question, ‘Why have you chosen to not mark again?’ among Modern Studies respondents was ‘Frustration with SQA’ (71%), while for all respondents the most common answer was ‘Marking does not pay enough’.

One interview participant explained that Modern Studies markers are given a random selection of scripts, resulting in them jumping between topics that learners have written about. It was felt that this made marking as a whole more time-consuming. This participant said that it would be preferable to sort scripts by topic so that markers can get through the papers more quickly, and they would not have to have such a wide breadth of knowledge as well.

‘There’s a randomness to the allocation, which means that script one pops up and I’m doing crime and I’m doing Scottish democracy and I’m doing South Africa. Script two pops up and I’m doing poverty and I’m in Ukraine ... And so, it’s like, there’s a lot of studying for markers. We know the topics that we teach really well. I don’t know a lot about Brazil. I don’t know a lot about South Africa.’

Physical Education

As with other subjects, respondents who marked for Physical Education (PE) expressed similar concerns about pay and the ambiguity around marking instructions and standards given by team leaders.

There were some issues that appeared to be more prevalent among PE respondents, although these were still expressed by a minority of participants. For example, several respondents spoke about the increased difficulties of getting time out of school to attend marking events and how they perceived headteachers to be less willing than before to allow multiple markers from the same department to leave the school.

‘It is getting more difficult to get out of school and schools are not wanting teachers to go out as much anymore, which is difficult.’

‘My school and leadership team seem to be more reluctant as years go on to allow staff [or] multiple staff out of departments to take part in markers meetings.’

It was not clear why this may be more of an issue for PE markers than for other subjects that also had to attend central marking meetings. One PE respondent explained that Advanced Higher PE central marking takes seven days, so it may be that more time is required of PE markers than markers in other subjects.

‘Advanced Higher PE is marked centrally and across seven days which for some is just too long or too far away to make participation possible. I personally can stay away from home for that long, but I can understand why others cannot. If there was the option after the central markers meeting to either stay and mark centrally or mark scripts remotely this may mean more folk are able to participate.’

Another theme that was mentioned by a few PE respondents was that the time given to complete the marking allocation was too short, and that some PE components took a longer time to mark and that this should be taken into account.

‘I feel there could be more time given to complete the marking allocation. The PE portfolio is 60 marks with no word limit, so sometimes a paper can take a long time to mark. This should be considered when allocating the pay that we receive per paper.’

‘[An] extended marking period would be beneficial to allow markers to spread workload.’

Other subjects

Although they did not have the highest withdrawal rates, there were some subjects with notable challenges that were specific to that subject.

English:

It was felt that the update of the Scottish set text list required a lot of additional unpaid work for markers as they would have to read all the new texts and engage with literary criticism to prepare for marking National 5 and Higher papers.

In general, assessments associated with English were perceived by some markers as having a higher workload attached, which they did not feel they were compensated for.

History:

A persistent theme among History respondents was that the standards for Higher History were inconsistent and lacking transparency. Some also felt that there were leaders in the markers meeting for Higher History who spoke in an unprofessional way to markers.

Several respondents emphasised that they had been discouraged from continuing to mark for SQA for these reasons, and also because of the way that SQA responded to the criticism afterwards.

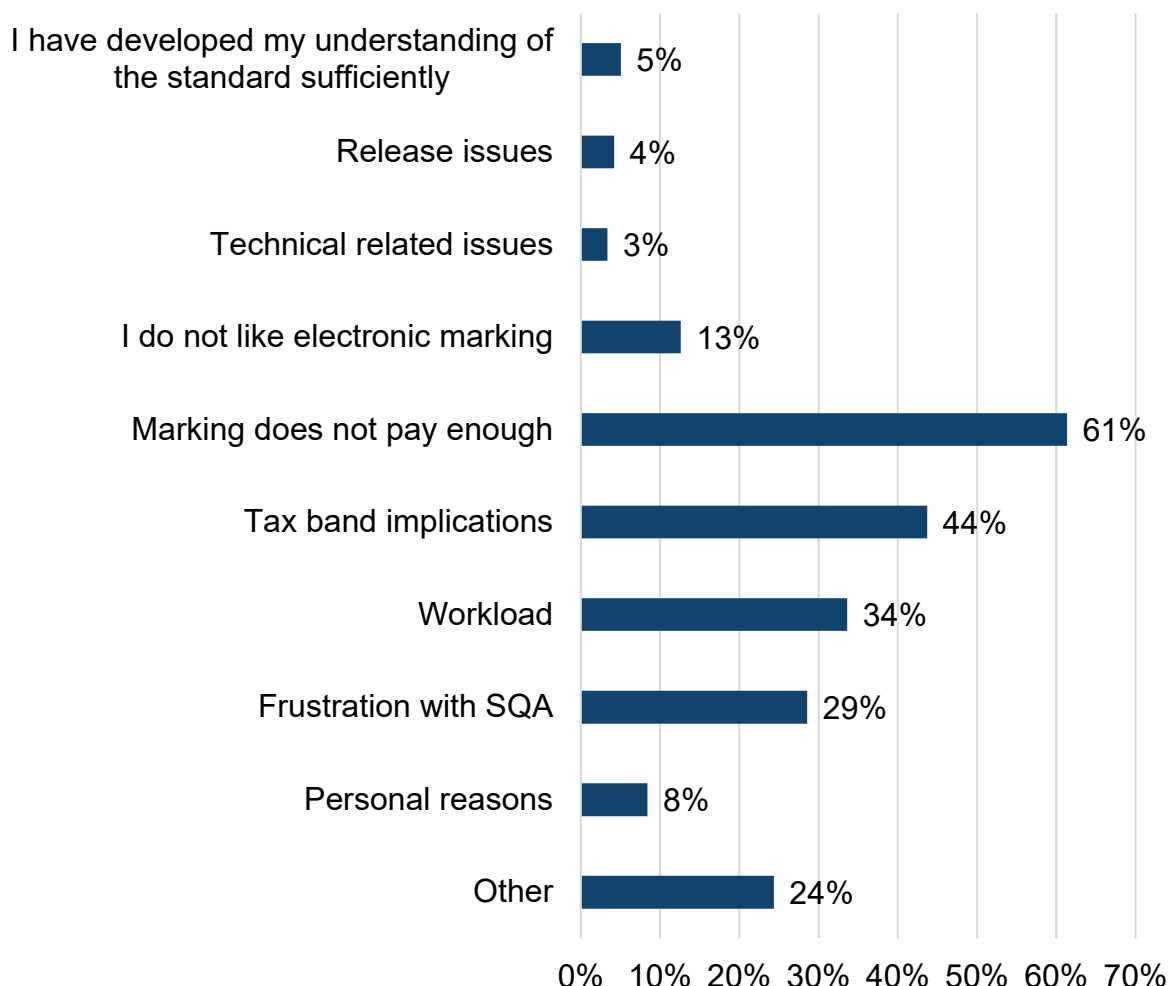
Mathematics:

Respondents who marked for Mathematics said that the annotation required for this subject slowed down marking, and it was felt unnecessary when a learner had achieved full or no marks.

Stopping and withdrawing from marking

Marker survey respondents were asked if they had decided to stop marking for SQA, and 16% of respondents said 'yes' while 83% of respondents said 'no'. Respondents who answered 'yes' were asked why they had chosen not to mark again. As shown in **Figure 7**, the most common answers were related to pay, with 61% opting for 'marking does not pay enough' and 44% opting for 'tax band implications'. A fairly high proportion also said their reasons for stopping were related to 'workload' (34%) and 'frustration with SQA' (29%).

Figure 7: Why have you chosen not to mark again?



Base: 119 respondents.

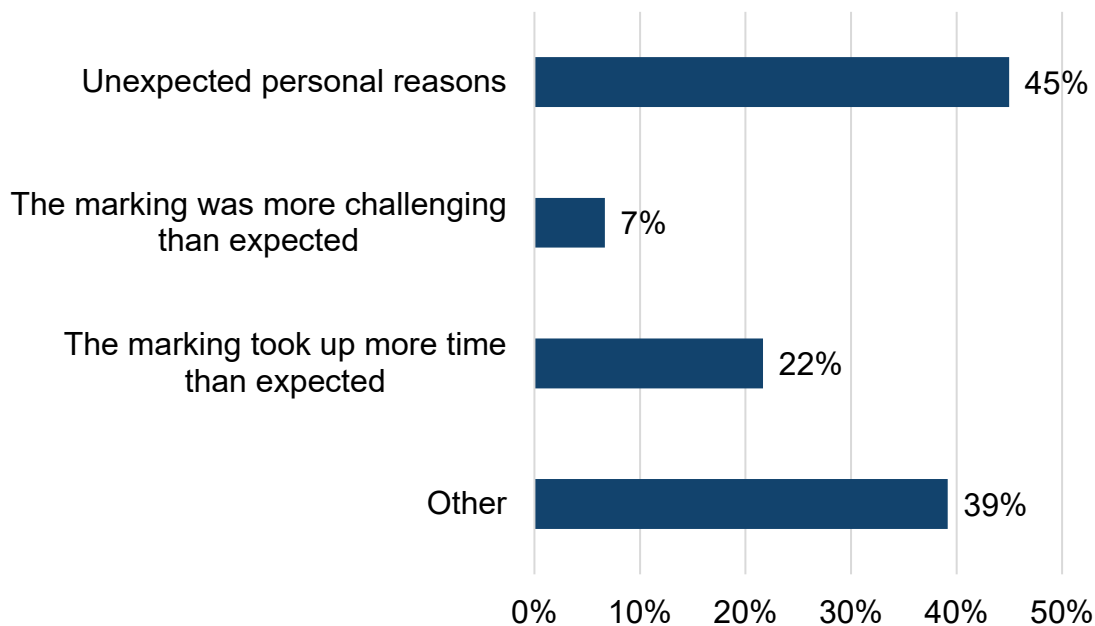
Around a quarter of respondents who answered this question said there were other reasons why they had stopped marking. In the open-text responses, a common response from respondents was that they were no longer eligible to mark due to retiring, changing subject or not teaching at the qualification level that year. Some said that they disagreed with this decision by SQA.

Marker survey respondents were also asked whether they withdrew from marking or had to return some of their allocation in 2022, 2023, or 2024. Seventeen per cent of respondents said 'yes' and 83% of respondents said 'no'.

Again, the respondents who answered 'yes' were asked why they needed to withdraw from marking. As shown in **Figure 8**, the most common reason was 'unexpected personal reasons' with 45% opting for this. This was followed by 39% of respondents who opted for

'other'. In the open-text responses, common reasons for withdrawing were school commitments and reasons relating to the way marking was run by SQA.

Figure 8: Why did you need to withdraw from marking?

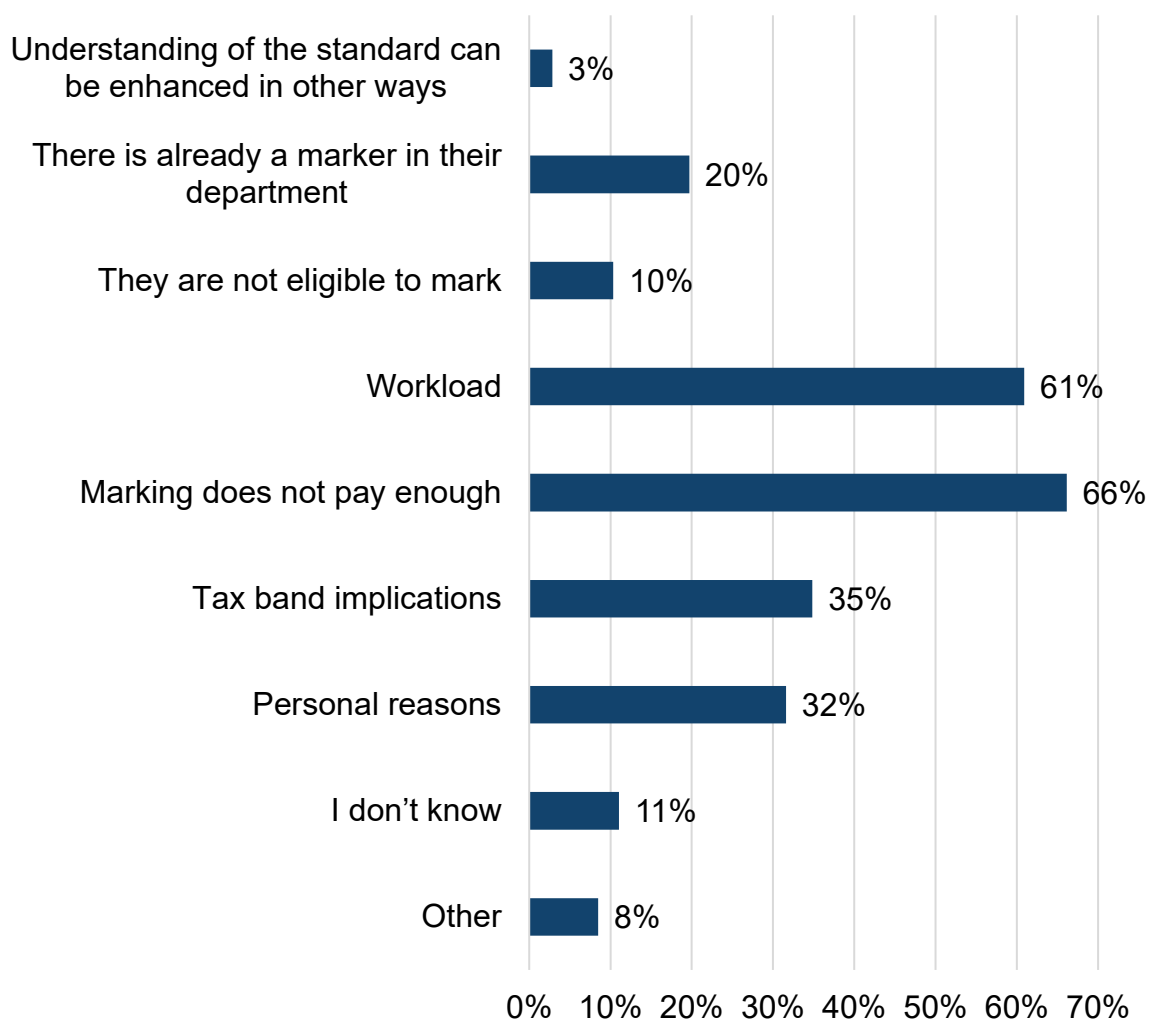


Base: 120 respondents.

Reasons for not marking

When asked why their colleagues who were not SQA markers choose not to mark, the most common response from marker survey respondents was 'marking does not pay enough' with 66% of respondents opting for this (**Figure 9**). This was followed by 'workload' at 61%. A moderate proportion of respondents also said, 'tax band implications' (35%), 'personal reasons' (32%) and 'there is already a marker in their department' (20%).

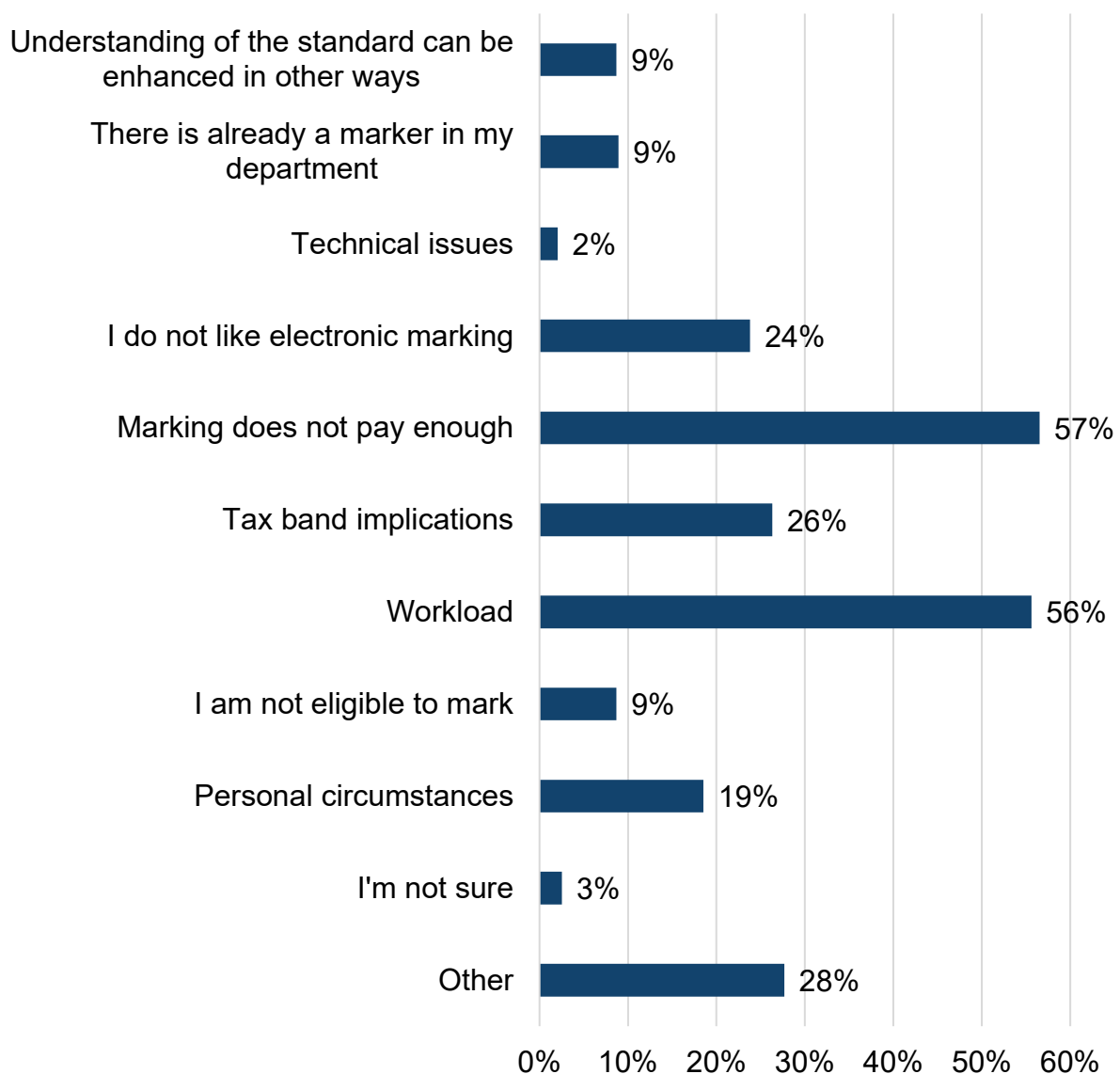
Figure 9: If you have colleagues who are not SQA markers, do you know why they choose not to mark?



Base: 706 respondents.

Those who had not marked for SQA in 2022, 2023 and 2024 were asked the same question. The results were broadly similar. As shown in Figure 10, the most common reasons for choosing not to mark for SQA were 'marking does not pay enough' (57%) and 'workload' (56%). This was followed by 'tax band implications' (26%), 'I do not like electronic marking' (24%) and 'personal circumstances' (19%).

Figure 10: Why have you chosen not to become an SQA marker before now?



Base: 437 respondents.

Twenty-eight per cent of respondents who did not mark for SQA said they did not mark for an 'other' reason.

The most common theme to emerge was that they had applied to be a marker but had been told the subject was full, their application had been rejected, or they had not heard back at all. Similarly, many said they had wanted to mark but that there were never any vacancies advertised for their subject. Others said that they had never seen a vacancy for marking advertised or did not know how to apply.

Another common theme was that those who had never marked for SQA were not willing to give up the free time they had, such as weekends and school holidays, when their day-to-day work in schools was so busy. Others said the time required to mark was too much of a commitment.

Frustration with SQA came up as another reason why some chose not to mark. This tended to be related to the way that marking meetings were run and perceived inconsistencies with

the standards from year to year. A few respondents said they had heard negative feedback from markers in their department about this and it had put them off applying. Others said they did not believe that educators should have to mark to understand the standard, and that SQA should be more transparent about how the standard was set and applied during the marking period.

A few respondents who had never marked before also explained that schools were unwilling to release them to mark or that they themselves were not willing to miss school to attend marking meetings.

A minority of respondents said that the marking process sounded too stressful, and they felt fearful about being judged. Some also said they did not feel experienced enough as a teacher to apply to be a marker.

A few respondents also mentioned that, during the application process, there was no transparency about how much SQA would pay them to mark, or about where or when meetings would be, which discouraged those with families.

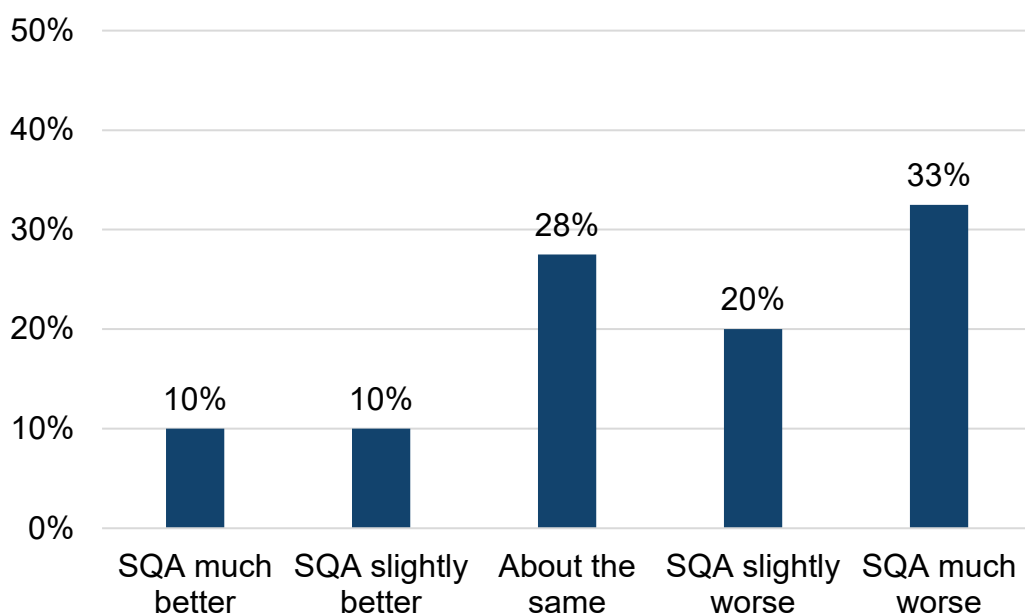
This suggests that a considerable number of non-markers would be interested in taking part in marking, as they had attempted to apply in the past. Indeed, when asked whether they planned to become an SQA marker in the future, around a quarter (24%) of non-marker respondents said 'yes', while 40% said 'I don't know' and 36% said 'no'.

Marking for other awarding bodies

Marker survey respondents were asked if they had ever marked for another awarding body. Only a small proportion (6%) said they had, while the vast majority said they had not (94%). Those who had marked for other awarding bodies were asked further questions comparing their experience of marking for SQA to other awarding bodies. It should be noted that just 40 respondents answered these questions, so readers should be wary of generalising the results to all markers who have marked for another awarding body.

As can be seen in **Figure 11**, over half of respondents said that financial rewards at SQA were worse than at other awarding bodies, with 33% of respondents stating that the financial reward at SQA was much worse. However, 20% of respondents said that the financial rewards were better at SQA than other awarding bodies.

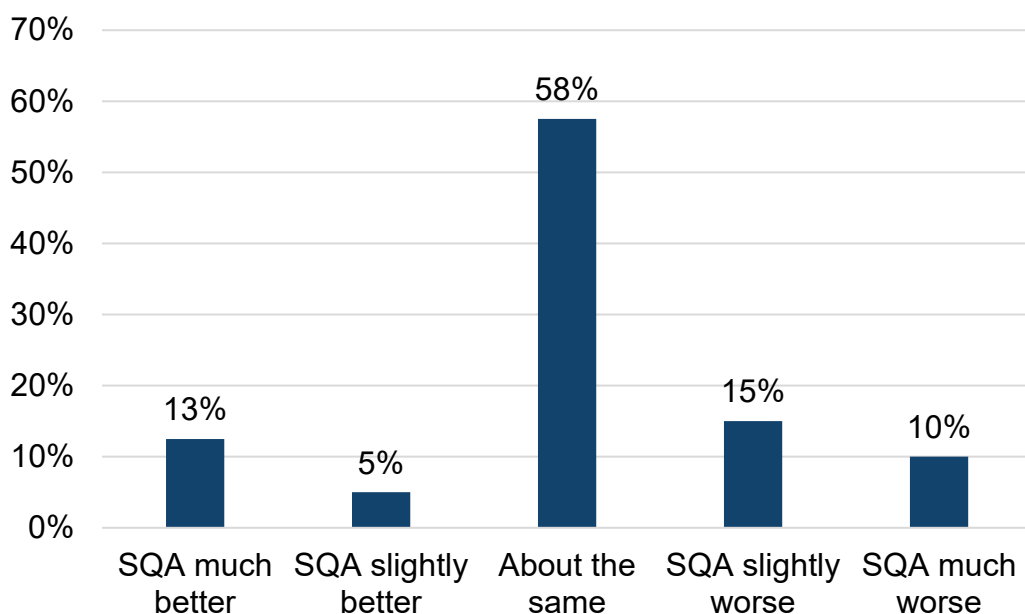
Figure 11: How does the financial reward of marking for SQA compare with a different awarding body?



Base: 40 respondents.

Marker survey respondents who had marked for other awarding bodies were also asked how the communication from other awarding bodies when marking compared to SQA's communication. As can be seen in **Figure 12**, 58% of respondents thought communications were 'about the same', with 25% finding communications from SQA worse and 18% finding communications from SQA better than other awarding bodies.

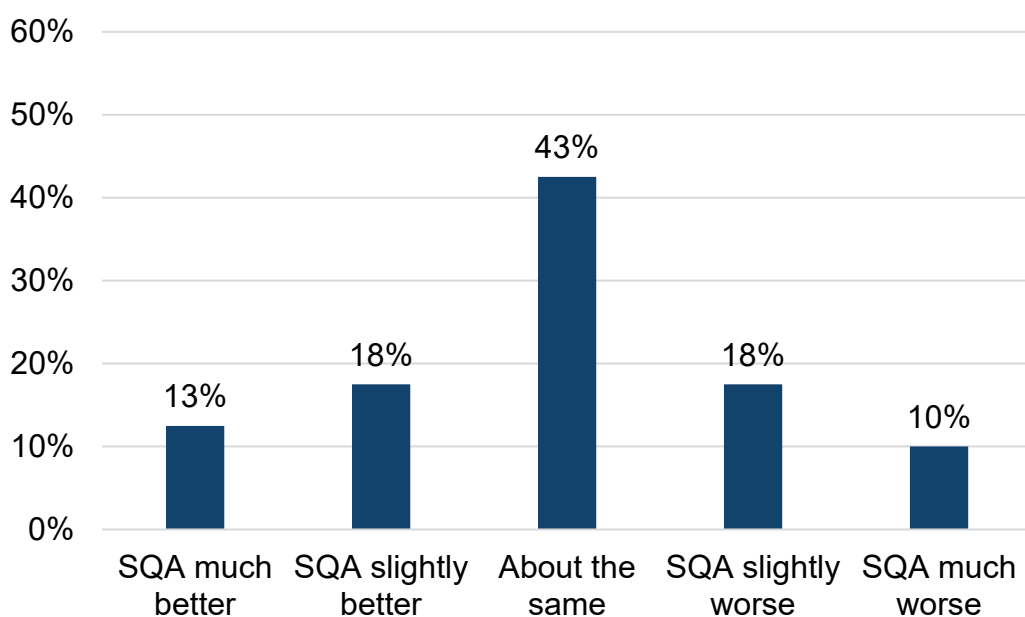
Figure 12: How do the communications marking for SQA compare with a different awarding body?



Base: 40 respondents.

Marker survey respondents who had marked for other awarding bodies were asked how the support for markers compares with the experience when marking for SQA. **Figure 13** shows that 43% of respondents thought that the support was 'about the same', with 31% saying SQA support was better and 28% stating that SQA support was worse

Figure 13: How does the support marking for SQA compare with a different awarding body?

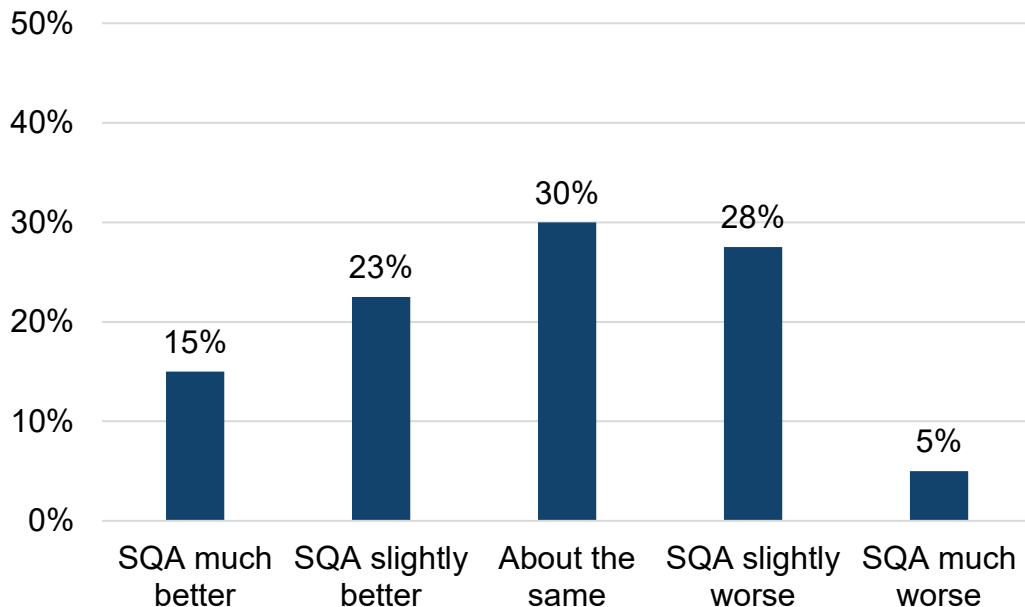


Base: 40 respondents.

Marker survey respondents who had marked for other awarding bodies were also asked about marking processes. As shown in **Figure 14**, 28% thought that processes were 'slightly

worse' at SQA, with 5% saying they were 'much worse'. 30% of respondents that that marking processes at SQA were 'about the same' as other awarding bodies, with 23% stating that SQA processes with slightly better, and 15% stating they were 'much better' at SQA.

Figure 14: How do the marking processes for SQA compare with a different awarding body?



Base: 40 respondents.

Wider context

This desk research summarises the requirements to mark for awarding bodies across the UK, as well as the training and support provided by the awarding bodies. Headline statistics from the 2022 Ofqual Survey of Examiners have been included, so a sector comparison can be made with SQA figures. This information was obtained via targeted web search and review of relevant awarding body websites, and therefore the level of detail differs between awarding organisations.

AQA

The pay rate for AQA is £500 and £1000, depending on the type and volume of papers marked.

A practitioner needs to have:

- ◆ Three full terms of teaching experience of their chosen subject(s) and level(s) gained in the last five years
- ◆ A senior professional referee able to verify their relevant experience
- ◆ Preferably a degree, teaching qualification, or equivalent in their chosen subject(s)
- ◆ Windows PC (version 8 or above) — AQA is not able to support Apple devices

AQA also considers applications to Drama, Economics, Geography, Religious Studies and Sociology from trainee teachers, early career teachers, agency registered tutors, lecturers and PhD students.

Pearson Edexcel

No pay rates are specified on the Pearson website. A practitioner does not need experience of teaching Pearson qualifications to mark for Pearson.

Requirements:

- ◆ One academic year's worth of teaching experience:
 - within the last 8 years
 - within the relevant qualification and subject
- ◆ A degree or equivalent
- ◆ A qualified teacher
- ◆ The ability to work well under pressure
- ◆ The ability to meet deadlines
- ◆ A high level of subject knowledge in order to apply the mark scheme

CCEA

No pay rates are specified on the CCEA website.

Requirements:

- ◆ Fully qualified teacher with one year's teaching experience in a relevant specification area
- ◆ Preferably, currently teaching one of the CCEA specifications, or have a broad knowledge of the specification area
- ◆ Eligible to work in the UK

Online training is available for newly appointed examiners prior to a standardising meeting.

OCR

Markers can be paid £240 to £1,500 for marking a full allocation (dependent on the complexity and level of the paper). The exact number of scripts marked will depend on the exam level and the script length. As a guideline, a marker for OCR can expect the target to be between 200 and 450 scripts. The marking window is typically two to three weeks long and falls within the period May to July.

Requirements:

- ◆ A teaching qualification or a degree in a related subject
- ◆ Subject expertise
- ◆ Teaching experience within the last three years. For some tasks, OCR also considers PGCE students who have completed the classroom teaching element of their course and/or have QTS status
- ◆ Previous or current teaching experience within the UK education system

Markers do not need to be teaching the OCR specification of their subject. OCR are also interested in people with current or previous experience of working for other examination boards.

WJEC

Pay rates are not specified on the WJEC website. WJEC typically allocates approximately 350 scripts for GCSE, with marking undertaken over a three-week period. Markers are required to attend an Examiner/Moderator training conference, which is usually held on a

weekend where possible. A marker can specify which units they would like to mark in their supporting statement. First time examiners/moderators are only asked to assess in the summer period.

To mark for WJEC, the following criteria need to be met:

- ◆ To be a current or retired teacher or lecturer with teaching and assessment experience in the subject and level applying for
- ◆ Suitable academic qualifications in the subject, such as a degree and a teaching qualification
- ◆ To be a UK resident
- ◆ For marking, to be available for a period of approximately three weeks to undertake intensive script marking in May–July; for moderation to be available for a period of approximately three to six weeks between March and July
- ◆ To undertake mandatory Examiner/Moderator training
- ◆ A marker must have their Windows PC or laptop with Windows 8 or later installed (other systems may be supported)

Some criteria may vary depending on the qualification.

Support package includes:

- ◆ An introductory guide for new Examiners and Moderators – this includes information about the training event, script marking and logistics
- ◆ Annual Examiner / Moderator training conference specifically for qualification
- ◆ Additional tailored training materials
- ◆ Question paper(s) and detailed mark scheme(s) are sent to markers immediately after the examination so they can familiarise themselves thoroughly with the content before the training
- ◆ A stationery pack including labels, instruction booklet and additional materials
- ◆ A designated Team Leader and/or Principal Examiner/Moderator who will guide markers through the process
- ◆ Support via telephone and email with experienced appointees team and a designated Team Leader and/or Principal Examiner/Moderator
- ◆ Guidance on how to use systems

Ofqual Survey of Examiners 2022

Key facts from the Ofqual Survey of Examiners 2022 include:

- ◆ Examiners are confident in their ability to mark and moderate accurately and reliably – 97% (markers) and 94% (moderators).
- ◆ 48% of examiners reported unsatisfactory pay associated with the role.
- ◆ 89% of examiners intend to continue for the foreseeable future.
- ◆ Almost all examiners (over 99%) are teachers or former teachers. They have high levels of teaching experience (20 years on average), and just under three-quarters are currently teaching.
- ◆ About 90% of respondents examine only one subject.
- ◆ The workforce is largely stable. Most examiners in summer 2022 had examined before, and just over a tenth were new. Recruiting new examiners each year is important for the future of the workforce.
- ◆ Most examiners are positive about the marking and moderating process. Confidence remained high in summer 2022, despite adaptations being made to many assessments.

- ◆ Examiners are generally a highly satisfied workforce. More than four-fifths of respondents agreed that they are satisfied with their role, and an even higher proportion found their role meaningful and said they take pride in their work.
- ◆ Examiners said they find their role challenging (over four-fifths of respondents). A similar proportion (79%), however, said they enjoy it.

Improving recruitment and retention

Interview participants were asked if they had any suggestions on how SQA could improve the recruitment and retention of markers. There was a great deal of crossover here between potential recruitment strategies and potential retention strategies, and indeed with issues that have been previously mentioned in this report.

Pay and expenses

While several participants had noted that pay was not their main motivation for marking, interviewees nevertheless suggested that improving pay rates would improve marker recruitment and retention. A few interview participants also mentioned the tax issues discussed earlier.

‘For like a lot of people if it was paid more, you'd be more likely to do it.’

‘You'll need to give them some incentives if you're wanting to get younger people in.’

On retention, some comments suggested that after a number of years of marking, most CPD benefits had been realised, so financial rewards were really the only incentive. A couple of participants also suggested some sort of reward scheme for long service or an increase in pay after a certain number of years.

A few participants also mentioned expenses and the perception that these had stagnated over the years. Likewise, there were some criticisms of accommodation and food at events, as detailed earlier in this report.

Communicate the benefits of marking

Several interviewees thought that the benefits of making should be better communicated to improve recruitment of new markers. As stated earlier, many participants thought that the main benefit of marking was CPD, and several thought that this should be better communicated, particularly to newer teachers.

‘I think the SQA could make more of it in terms of how it helps you as develop your career.’

‘Advertising more about the benefits in terms of development for yourself and for your pupils.’

‘[The] reputation of being an SQA marker, that looks good in school.’

In terms of specific actions, participants suggested a range of ways to approach potential markers, including through dedicated sessions and demonstrations.

'Interview some people, talk about their experiences [and] see why it's benefited them ... and put them up on YouTube or something.'

'It may be worthwhile developing something ... so that people could get a feel [for] marking, see what it's like, and it may encourage them to go into it.'

'Maybe like a kind of trial day ... [to show] what it would be like to be a marker.'

'Maybe speaking to, you know, when probationer teachers have these evenings, and student teachers, when they have their sessions, that might be an idea.'

It was common for participants to state that they had learned about the benefits of marking through word of mouth from colleagues in their centre and some suggested that this was still the most effective way to recruit new markers.

Advertise roles more widely

While, as noted above, some participants said that they had been made aware of marking opportunities through word of mouth, others suggested that they had heard through their SQA co-ordinator, including through SQA News being forwarded on. Views on the effectiveness of this approach, however, seemed to vary depending on communication channels and strategies within individual centres.

There were also some concerns expressed that, where marking teams were well established, opportunities to join were limited.

'I think the thing about job adverts is probably quite key because I didn't know when to apply. I didn't know like what time of year [...] none of those things were really communicated.'

'I don't know how they advertise them, just seems to come out in emails every so often and you pick up on them, but if you miss it, you know ...'

In contrast, one participant stated that if you are interested in marking, it is very easy to find out about opportunities.

Other participants suggested advertising marking opportunities through other organisations including subject associations, schools, local authorities, Scottish Government, Education Scotland, Moray House, and GTCS. However, in a couple of interviews it was suggested that there was nothing more that SQA itself could do to advertise more widely.

A couple of participants suggested that marking should be presented to newer teachers as part of their professional responsibilities and that all teachers should be required mark at some stage in their career, but this was a minority view.

'So, say [if] you've got more than three members of the department, that it is mandatory for at least one person to go out and mark ... I don't know how that could be enforced. But that doesn't feel like it should be too much of an ask of a school. Not really.'

Marking eligibility

With regards to recruitment and retention of markers, some interview participants mentioned eligibility to mark. One thought that the requirement for three years' experience should be relaxed.

'If they're trained and they're willing to do it, I think [they] can. Actually, I think you have to be presenting at the level, but there's nothing to say that someone who's been presenting three years who's not engaged in any marking is better prepared than someone, you know, who's done one year, and actually has engaged with training and marking. I think that's a discrepancy there.'

On the other hand, one participant thought that three years' experience was too short and that this, in turn, hindered retention. They believed that younger teachers with three years' experience would join a marking team for two years for the sake of their CV and then move on.

'I am also aware that there are many young teachers who think that SQA is a rite of passage and while the entry requirement is that you should have three years of presenting a course, many interpret this as three years in the job and some include their teaching practice. My view is that it is unlikely that a young teacher would have had full presentation experience their first three years of teaching. SQA might get better retention if they attract people with a bit more experience and are more rigorous with the entry requirement.'

A couple of participants thought that SQA should make more use of retired teachers, not least because many will continue to tutor even if they are no longer teaching. A couple thought that potential markers who, for whatever reason, could only commit to marking part time or a limited number of scripts should be welcome to mark.

Communications

As noted earlier, there was a feeling from some interview participants that they would have appreciated more detailed feedback on their marking. These participants generally also linked this to improved retention. A number of participants suggested that, as well as feedback, they would like more acknowledgement for their efforts and some sort of official thank you. One participant suggested that they would like more information from SQA on possible progression and skills development opportunities within their marking team.

These comments all fitted into a theme that better communication and feedback would make markers feel more appreciated and valued and would serve to increase retention.

Other comments on retention

Several participants suggested that improved technical systems would increase retention. Some felt that the system as it is slow and clunky. Others complained of technical issues or issues with MS Teams meetings. One participant thought that SQA should provide markers' hardware. However, a couple of markers did comment on the helpfulness of helpline staff.

When thinking about ways to retain markers, the issue of better training, gentler communication styles, and support for new markers was again raised. Participants identified a real risk of markers disengaging if they did not receive appropriate support during their first marking experience.

‘The big issue I know we’ve got this year is actually retaining markers ... there are markers ... that won’t come back because ... they did not have a good experience last year. They just found it very, very stressful, very, very difficult.’

‘Maybe even a bit of training before you’re going to start the marking ... It might be better to do an element of training in advance of that because it can be quite daunting for people ... I’ve got colleagues in school who marked last year and have decided because of their experience, they will not mark this year.’

‘I think the feedback could be quite demoralising. You know, as a professional, you like to think that you understand your job ... So, I believe that, you know, maybe possibly part of the reason why some people don’t reapply for marking is because it’s just a dent in confidence.’

Other suggestions to improve the marking experience — and therefore retention — (some of which have already been discussed in this report) included clearer marking instructions and guidance, more time available to mark, more markers, more engaging online meetings, and more experienced team leaders.

Views of non-markers

Respondents to the non-marker survey were also asked if there was anything SQA could do to make becoming a marker in their subject more attractive.

Again, the biggest theme to emerge from this question was to increase the pay.

The second most common theme was related to workload, and respondents suggested extending the timeframe to complete marking, allowing educators to mark during the school day, or giving the option for markers to take on fewer scripts.

Non-markers also suggested that SQA could be more communicative about what marking involved during the application process, such as the dates when marking would take place, when and where meetings would be, and the pay they would receive.

Related to this was the wish for more transparency from SQA about what the process of marking looks like, such as how ambiguous marks are decided, and more information about how standards are set each year. Suggestions for how to do this were to film marking meetings and post them online, to share minutes of marking meetings, and to share annotated marking instructions with reasons why marks are awarded.

There was a suggestion to offer more training opportunities to non-markers or new markers to build their confidence in being able to mark.

Some respondents also suggested that SQA should offer more places on marking teams to those who apply. Related to this was a sense that SQA should widen the eligibility criteria for markers, such as hiring markers who have been teaching for less time, and allowing markers who are not currently teaching the qualification, but are teaching the subject.

Appendix

The table below details respondents to the NQ marker survey by subject.

Table 2: In which subject(s) do you mark?

Subject	Number of survey respondents	Proportion of survey respondents	Number of all markers (2022–24)	Proportion of all markers (2022–24)
Accounting	4	1%	36	0%
Administration and IT	19	2%	157	2%
Applications of Mathematics	17	2%	246	3%
Art and Design	38	5%	446	5%
Biology	44	6%	499	5%
Business Management	30	4%	361	4%
Cantonese	0	0%	12	0%
Care	3	0%	34	0%
Chemistry	45	6%	512	5%
Childcare and Development	2	0%	19	0%
Classical Studies	3	0%	24	0%
Computing Science	15	2%	208	2%
Cruinn-eolas	0	0%	1	0%
Dance	1	0%	29	0%
Design and Manufacture	13	2%	164	2%
Drama	11	1%	140	1%
Eachdraidh	0	0%	2	0%
Economics	2	0%	25	0%
Engineering Science	9	1%	53	1%
English	116	15%	1482	16%
ESOL	1	0%	39	0%
Environmental Science	0	0%	33	0%

Subject	Number of survey respondents	Proportion of survey respondents	Number of all markers (2022–24)	Proportion of all markers (2022–24)
Fashion and Textile Technology	4	1%	38	0%
French	12	2%	144	2%
Gaelic (Learners)	0	0%	10	0%
Gàidhlig	0	0%	10	0%
Geography	26	3%	400	4%
German	0	0%	34	0%
Graphic Communication	12	2%	173	2%
Health and Food Technology	8	1%	110	1%
History	52	7%	630	7%
Human Biology	12	2%	125	1%
Italian	0	0%	16	0%
Latin	1	0%	20	0%
Mandarin	1	0%	7	0%
Matamataig	0	0%	4	0%
Mathematics	68	9%	705	7%
Media	3	0%	49	1%
Modern Studies	40	5%	428	4%
Music	14	2%	232	2%
Music Technology	5	1%	83	1%
Nuadh-Eolas	0	0%	1	0%
Philosophy	1	0%	27	0%
Photography	6	1%	65	1%
Physical Education	25	3%	593	6%
Physics	30	4%	393	4%
Politics	6	1%	41	0%

Subject	Number of survey respondents	Proportion of survey respondents	Number of all markers (2022–24)	Proportion of all markers (2022–24)
Practical Cake Craft	4	1%	38	0%
Practical Cookery	16	2%	153	2%
Practical Electronics	0	0%	6	0%
Practical Metalworking	1	0%	5	0%
Practical Woodworking	3	0%	34	0%
Psychology	5	1%	77	1%
RMPS	21	3%	174	2%
Sociology	3	0%	28	0%
Spanish	14	2%	153	2%
Statistics	2	0%	4	0%
Urdu	0	0%	6	0%
Total	768	100%	9,517	100%