



Evaluation of the 2022 Approach to the Assessment of Graded National Courses:

Practitioner experiences

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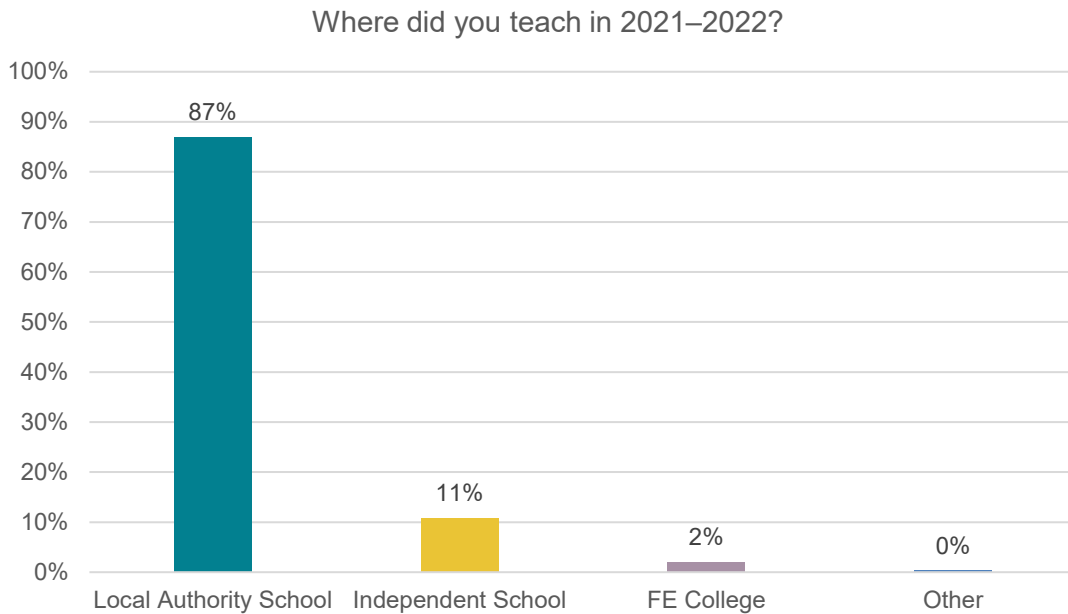
1 Respondent profiles

Please note that, throughout this paper (in charts and in text), percentages may not always sum to 100% due to rounding.

Survey respondents

Practitioner survey respondents were asked where they taught.

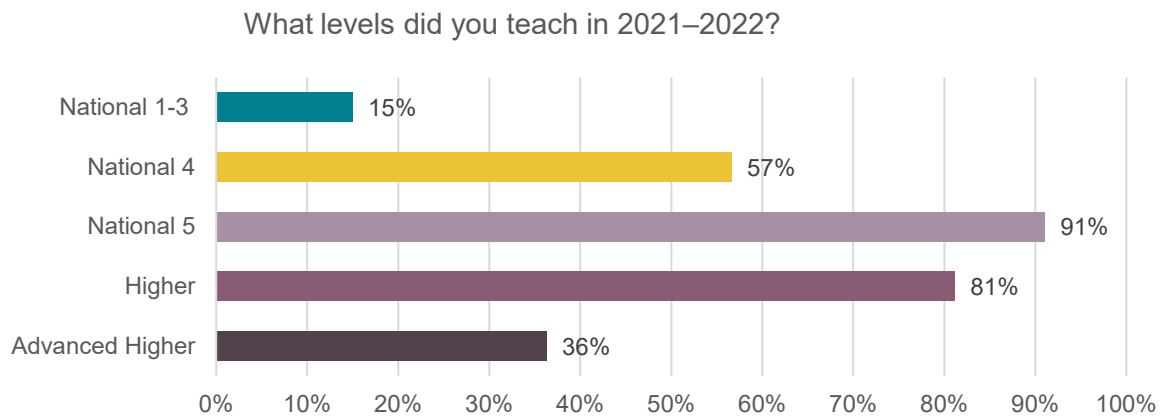
Figure 1



While a large majority of respondents indicated that they taught in a local authority school (87%), a smaller percentage (11%) indicated that they worked in an independent school, and 2% of respondents worked in an FE college. Only three respondents selected ‘other’ in response to this question.

Practitioners were then asked what level or levels of qualification they had taught in 2021–22 (Figure 2). The majority of practitioners indicated that they taught National 5 (91%) or Higher (81%). Smaller proportions indicated they taught National 4 (57%) and Advanced Higher (36%). A much smaller percentage (15%) indicated they had taught National 1–3 in 2021–22.

Figure 2

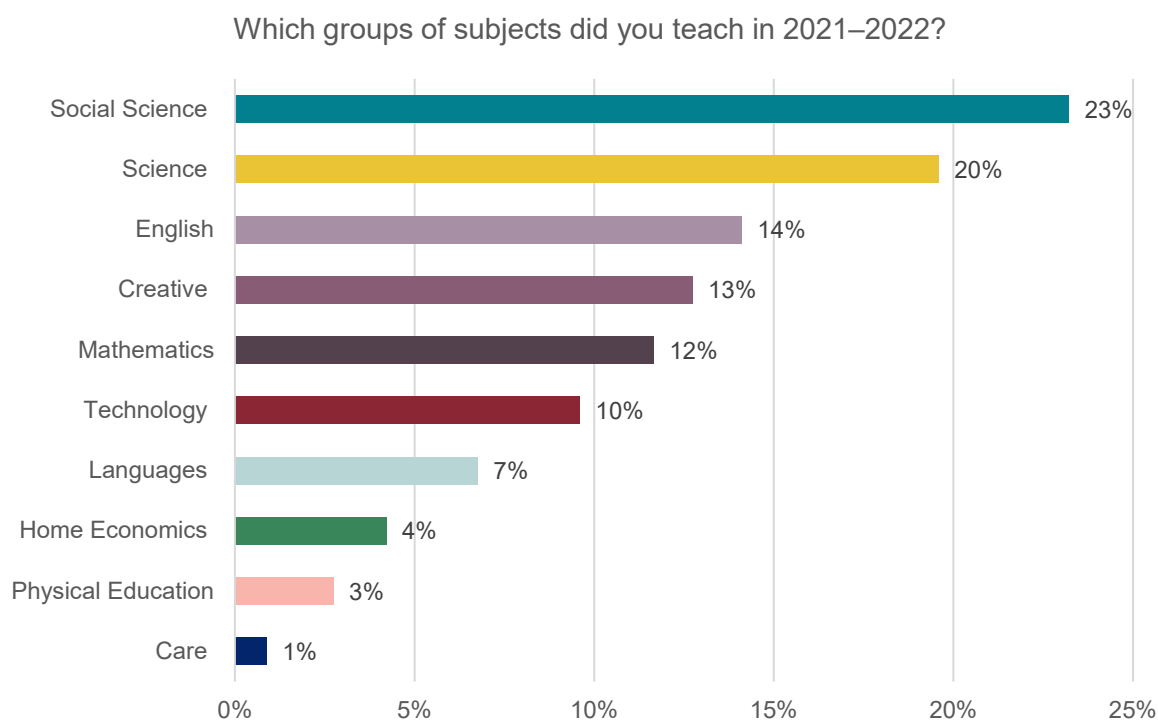


Practitioners were then asked which groups of subjects they taught in 2021–2022. Results are shown in Figure 3.

Each group includes the following subjects:

- ◆ Social Science: Classical Studies, Geography, History, Modern Studies, Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, RMPS, Sociology
- ◆ Science: Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Human Biology, Physics
- ◆ Creative: Art and Design, Dance, Drama, Media, Music, Music Technology, Photography
- ◆ Mathematics: Applications of Mathematics, Mathematics, Mathematics of Mechanics, Statistics
- ◆ Technology: Computing Science, Design and Manufacture, Engineering Science, Graphic Communication, Practical Electronics, Practical Metalworking, Practical Woodworking
- ◆ Languages: Chinese Languages, English for Speakers of Other Languages, French, Gaelic (Learners), Gàidhlig, German, Italian, Latin, Spanish, Urdu
- ◆ Home Economics: Fashion and Textile Technology, Health and Food Technology, Practical Cake Craft, Practical Cookery
- ◆ Care: Care, Childcare and Development

Figure 3



In general terms, the graph shows a wide range of subjects captured by the survey.

Practitioners were asked which local authority area their centre was based in. Table 1 lists the responses in descending order.

Table 1: Which local authority area is your centre based in?

Local authority area	Total number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Edinburgh	94	9%
North Lanarkshire	86	8%
Glasgow	76	7%
Fife	71	7%
Aberdeenshire	64	6%
Aberdeen	59	6%
Falkirk	52	5%
Dumfries and Galloway	41	4%
Renfrewshire	41	4%
Highland	40	4%
West Lothian	37	4%
South Lanarkshire	35	3%
East Dunbartonshire	31	3%
Midlothian	30	3%
South Ayrshire	29	3%
Perth and Kinross	24	2%

Scottish Borders	22	2%
Argyll and Bute	20	2%
North Ayrshire	20	2%
Angus	18	2%
East Renfrewshire	17	2%
Dundee	15	1%
West Dunbartonshire	15	1%
Shetland Islands	14	1%
Inverclyde	13	1%
East Lothian	11	1%
East Ayrshire	10	1%
Orkney Islands	10	1%
Stirling	9	1%
Moray	8	1%
Clackmannanshire	5	0%
Na h-Eileanan Siar (Western Isles)	2	0%

As can be seen from the table, practitioners were from across all 32 local authority areas. The largest number of respondents were from the Edinburgh area (9%) and from the North Lanarkshire area (8%).

In order to identify those who had recent involvement with SQA's assessment processes, practitioners were asked if they had been an SQA appointee, such as a marker or a principal assessor, within the past five years; 46% of respondents indicated they had.

Practitioners were also asked if they had taught learners who are disabled and/or have ASN in 2021–2022; the vast majority, 86%, indicated they had.

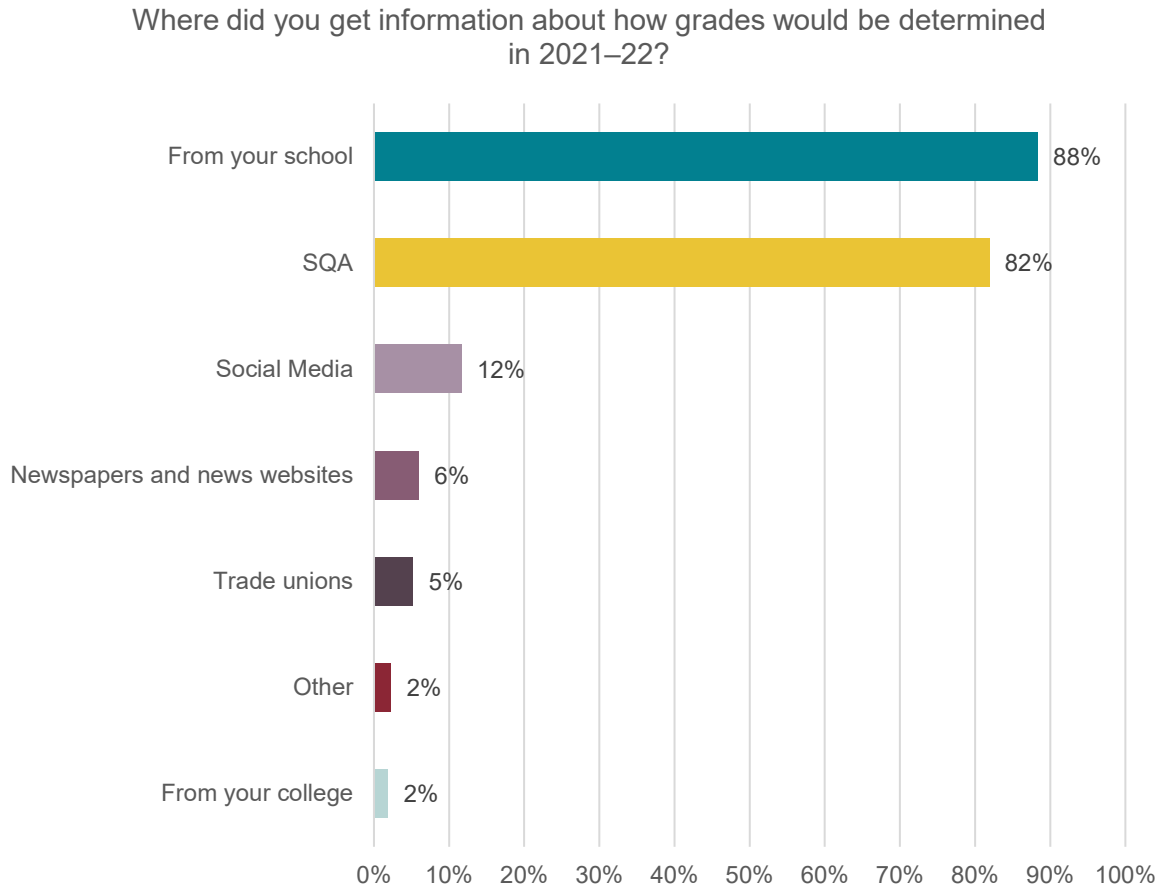
Interview participants

Twenty-six in-depth interviews were held: 20 with secondary school teachers and six with FE college lecturers. As these interviews were qualitative, we did not attempt to cover a fully representative sample of practitioners. However, respondents taught a wide range of subjects and levels in 2022.

2 Engagement and communication

This section looks at how practitioners obtained information about the grading process in 2022. In particular, respondents were asked about sources of information used, the timing of information received, and how they understood how grades would be determined. Respondents could choose more than one option.

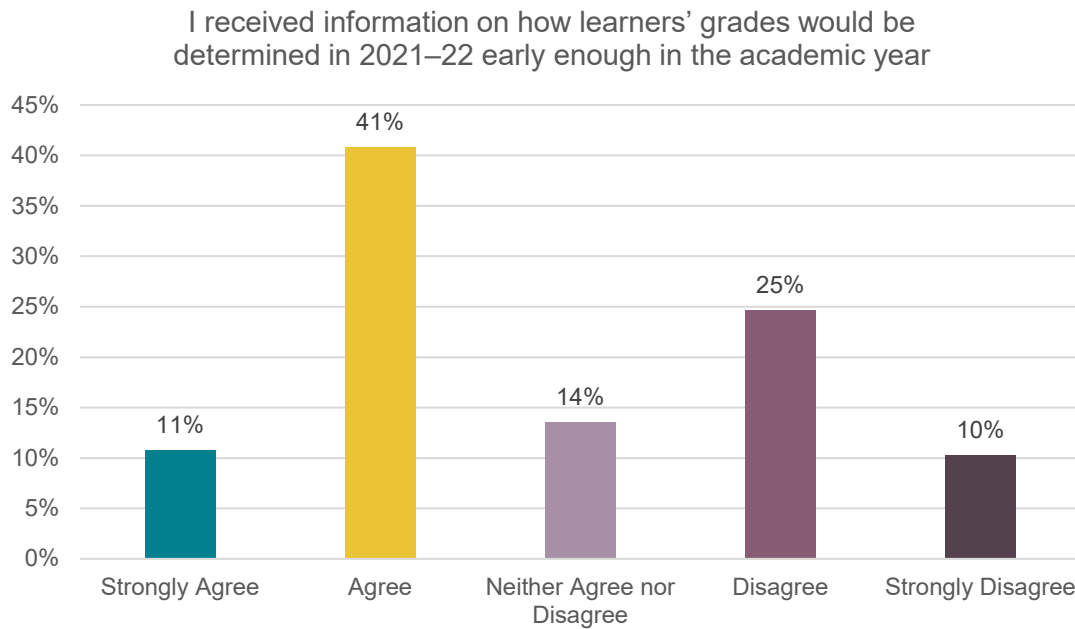
Figure 4



The majority (88%) of respondents had received information from their school, while 82% had received information from SQA. Smaller numbers of respondents had obtained information from social media (12%), newspapers and news websites (6%), trade unions (5%), and from their college (2%). Of the 2% who selected 'other', sources included local authorities, professional bodies and networks, colleagues, and friends.

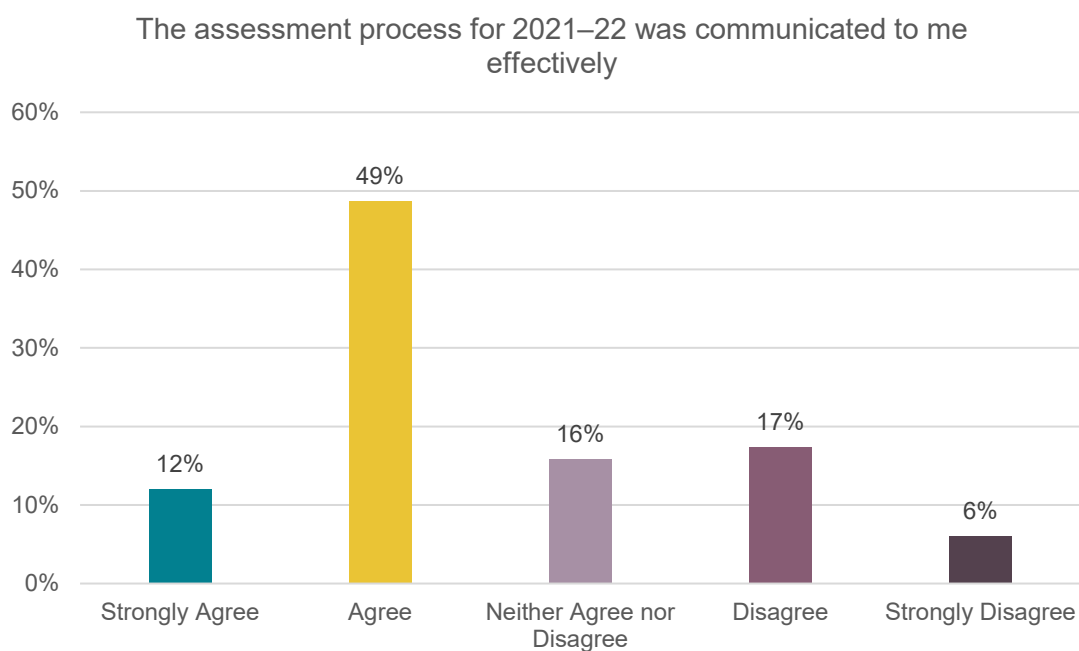
Practitioners were asked about the timing of information on how learners' grades would be determined in 2021–22. More than half of respondents (52%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had received information early enough in the academic year, whilst 35% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 5



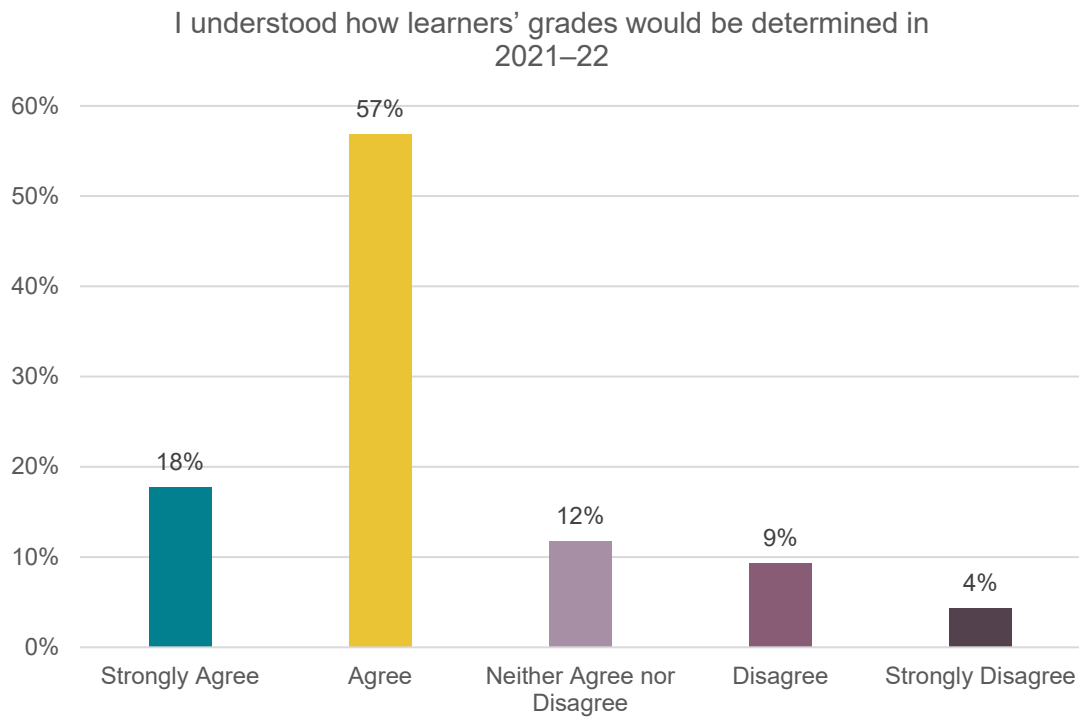
As shown in Figure 6, a total of 61% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that the assessment process for 2021–22 was communicated effectively. A smaller proportion, 23%, disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 6



Three-quarters of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement *I understood how learners' grades would be determined in 2021–22*, compared with 13% who disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 7

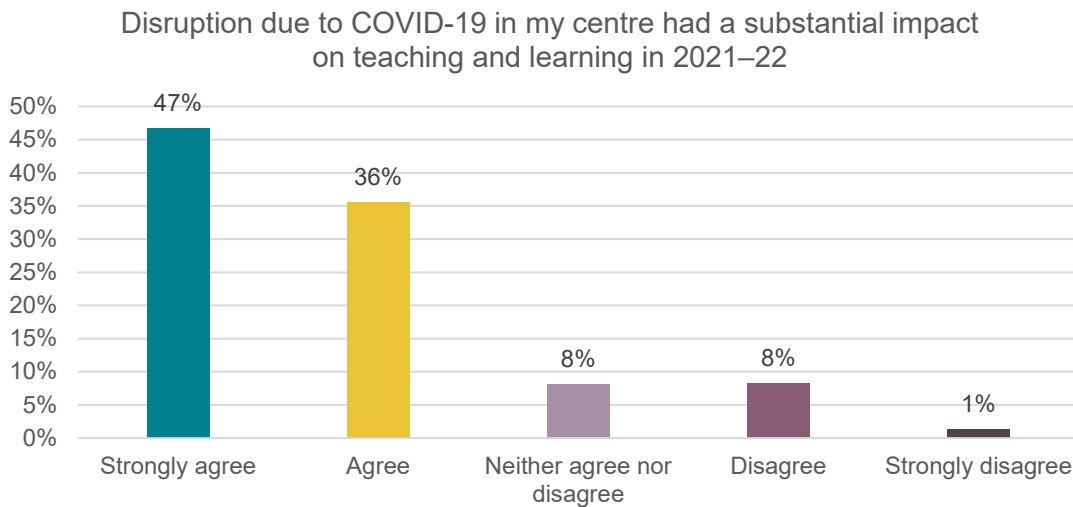


3 Teaching and learning

Practitioners were asked about the effect that COVID-19 disruption in 2021–22 had on the teaching and learning experience and on assessment.

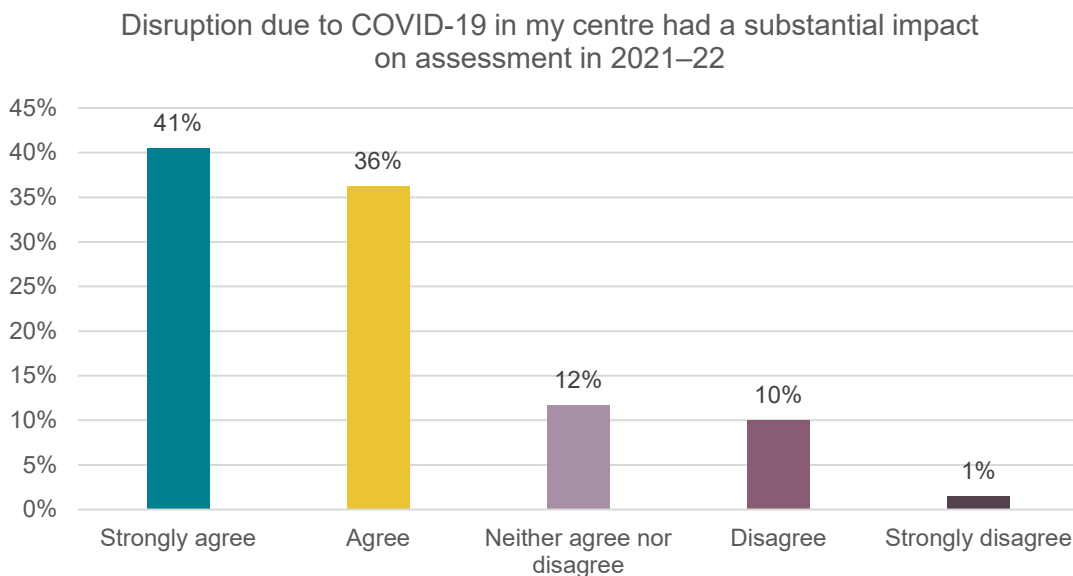
A large majority (82%) of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that disruption due to COVID-19 had a substantial impact on teaching and learning in 2021–22, with almost half strongly agreeing. Only 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 8% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 8



Practitioners also reported that disruption due to COVID-19 had a substantial impact on assessment in 2021–22, with 77% agreeing or strongly agreeing, 12% neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 11% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Figure 9

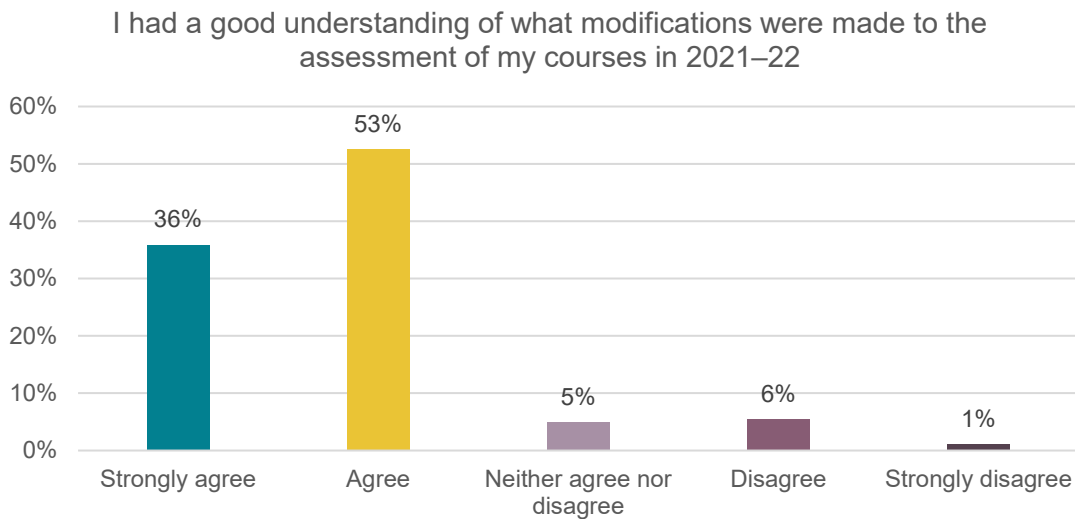


4 Modifications to assessment

Practitioners were asked about their level of agreement with a series of statements on modifications to assessment in 2021–22. (More information on modifications to course assessment is available on [our website](#).)

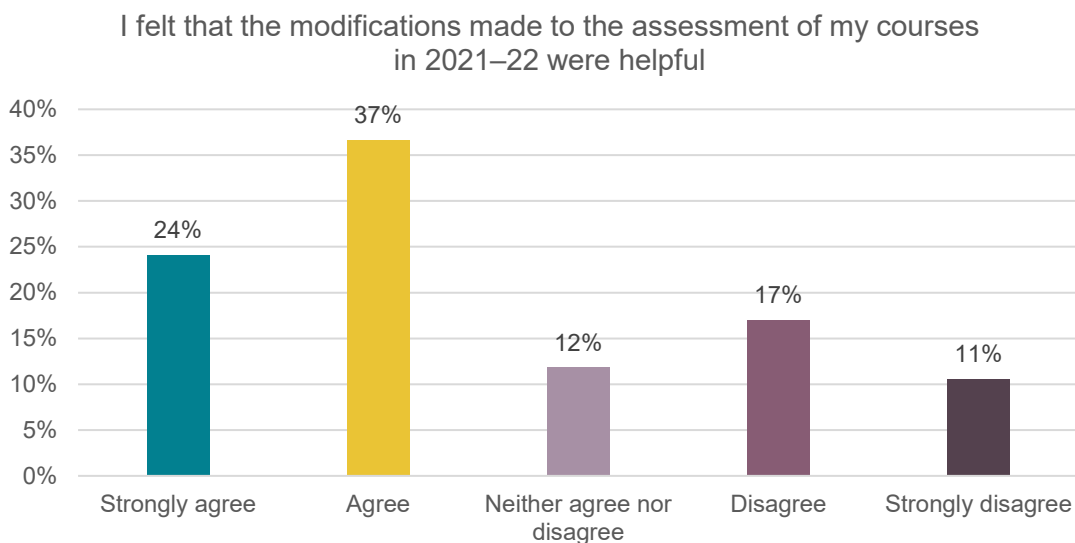
While 89% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had a good understanding of what modifications were made to the assessment of their courses in 2021–22, only 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 5% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 10



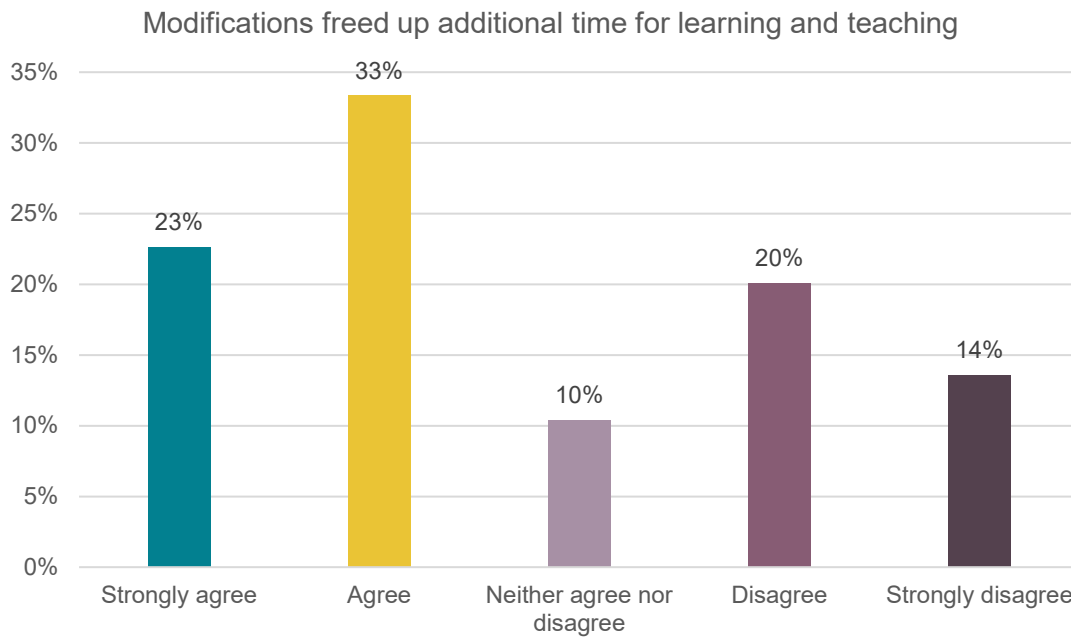
When asked about the helpfulness of modifications, 61% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the modifications made to the assessment of their courses were helpful, 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 12% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 11



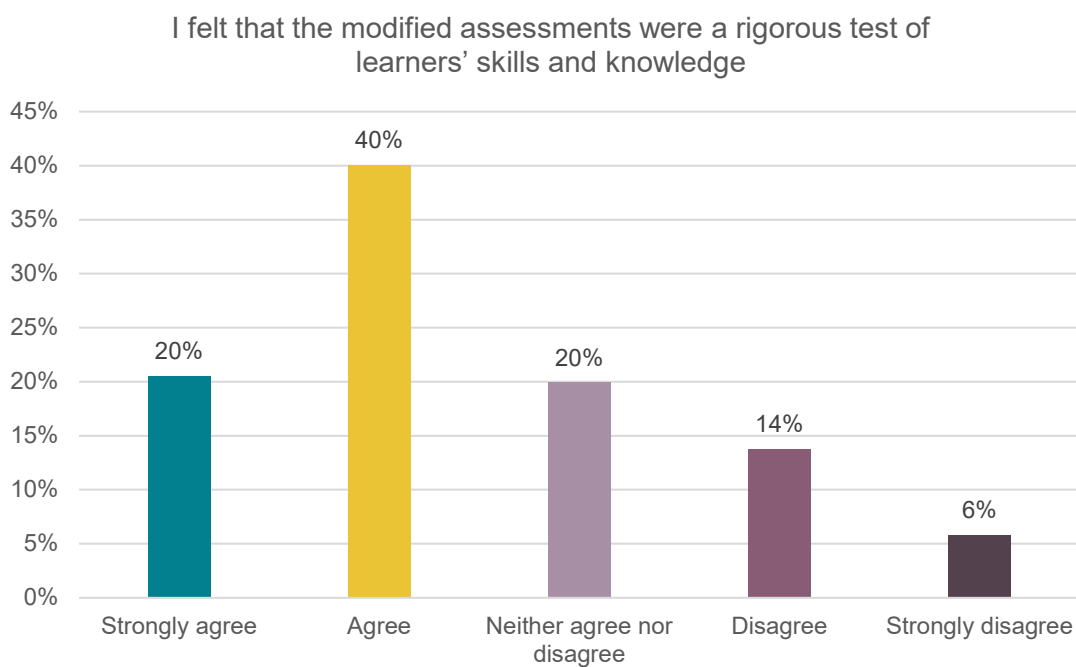
Whilst 56% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that modifications freed up additional time for learning and teaching, 34% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 10% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 12



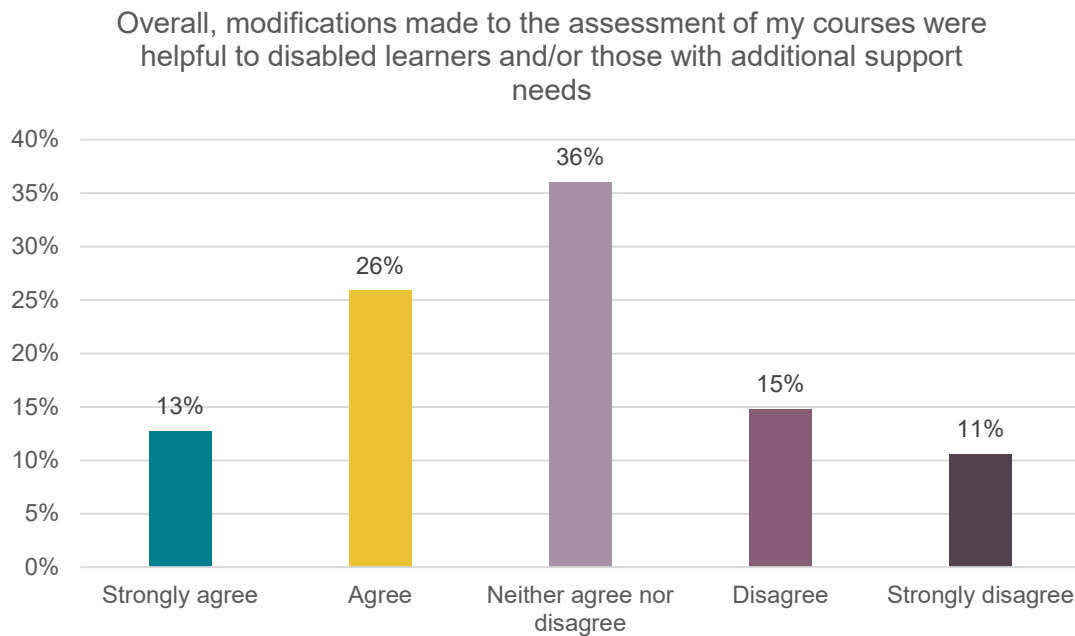
Overall, 60% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the modified assessments were a rigorous test of learners' skills and knowledge, 20% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 20% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 13



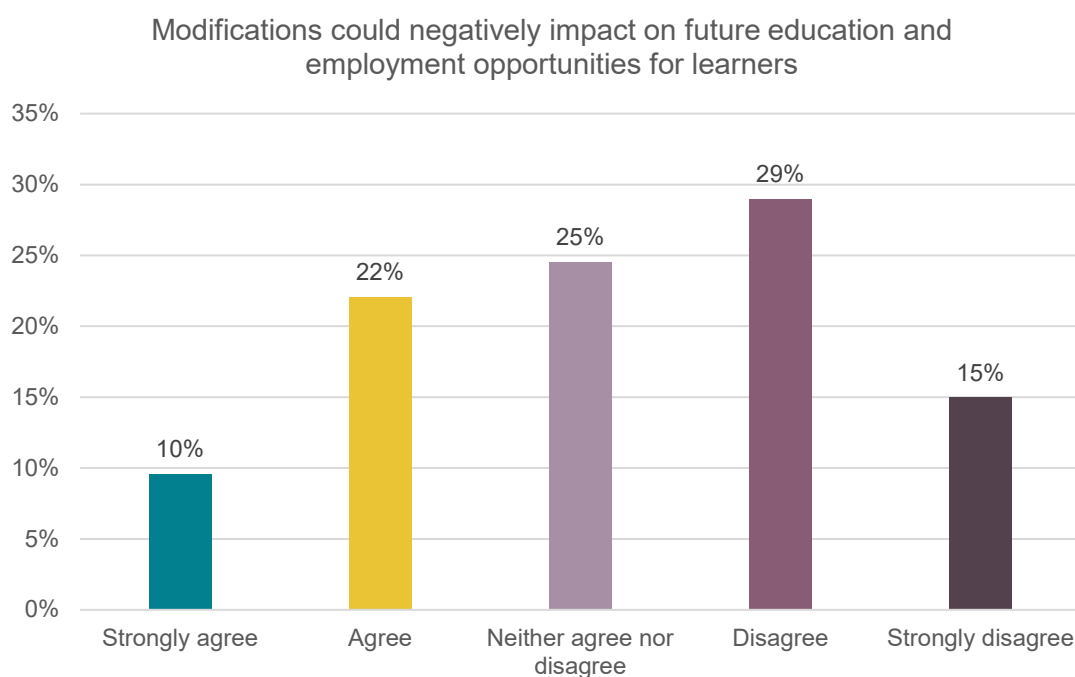
When asked about whether they agreed that the modifications to assessment were helpful to disabled learners and/or those with ASN, 39% agreed or strongly agreed, 36% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 25% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 14



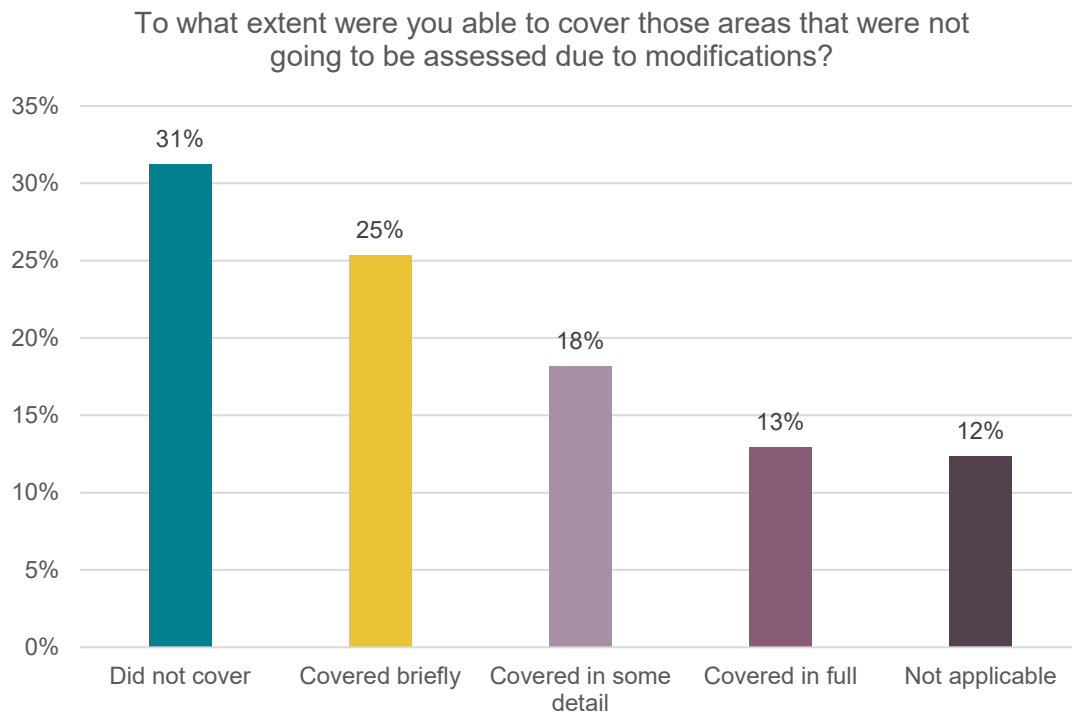
Almost a third of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that modifications could negatively impact future education and employment opportunities for learners, 44% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a quarter neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 15



Almost a third of practitioners reported not covering areas that were not going to be assessed due to modifications, and a quarter covered these areas only briefly. However, 18% reported covering them in some detail, and 13% said they covered them in full.

Figure 16



Modifications that worked well

Over 600 practitioners provided an answer when asked about any modifications that they felt worked particularly well in 2021–22.

The main themes emerging from the comments were:

- ◆ Modifications to assessment requirements and course content were beneficial as they allowed more time to concentrate on teaching and learning, which was necessary to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 disruption.
- ◆ Increased learner choice over areas of coursework and assessment worked well as it enabled more focused teaching and learning.

Assessment requirements

The main theme to emerge from practitioner responses was that modifications to assessment requirements in 2021–22 had worked well. Many respondents reported the removal of an assignment or the reduction in portfolio pieces as being particularly helpful. The removal or reduction of other forms of assessment, including exams, projects, and investigations, was also mentioned as being beneficial.

The predominant benefit of these modifications was in increasing time available for teaching and learning. Many practitioners highlighted that the reduced assessment requirements

alleviated pressure for both learners and practitioners, and meant there was increased time to concentrate on course content, skills development, deeper learning, and preparing for the remaining assessed elements. This was particularly important as the COVID-19 pandemic had caused significant disruption to the teaching and learning process, the effects of which were still being felt in 2021–22.

In Higher and National 5 language courses, it is far too much to expect students to complete two writing assessments. Removing the folio for both levels was therefore a preferable modification. The preparation for two writing assessments requires a lot of class time to prepare, which consequently takes time away from teaching the other skills (reading, listening, talking, grammar). Having only one writing assessment is better from a teacher workload standpoint and also from a student stress load standpoint.

Removal of assignments at National 5 and Higher. These are hugely time consuming. Due to the impact of learning lost during the pandemic in the sciences (where learning builds and builds) we massively struggled to cover all the content in the remaining time. We would never have covered it without the assignment being removed.

Course content

The second theme to emerge from practitioner responses was that reductions in course content worked well in 2021–22. Respondents reported that the removal of course content was welcome, with the removal of Added Value Unit from National 4 courses being considered particularly helpful. Again, practitioners found these modifications useful because of the extra time that was available to focus on other aspects of the course in more depth and at a more manageable pace. Some pointed out the courses were already very content-heavy, and time was needed to help mitigate the impact of COVID-19 disruption to teaching and learning.

Leaving out two topics from the Higher course did allow for extra time to be allocated to the rest of the course. It also allowed the pace of the teaching to slow to a manageable level for the pupils. Pupils in past years have found the pace of the Higher teaching to be too fast...too many topics in too little time. Last year was a good fit.

Removal of coursework allowing more time for teaching and learning. Due to COVID disruptions the year before on face-to-face teaching, much content from earlier courses had to be revised in order for students to be able to progress their understanding of certain concepts.

The National 4 Added Value Unit should be permanently removed in my opinion. Pupils have benefitted greatly from having more time to consolidate learning.

A number of practitioners suggested that the assessments and course content removed in 2021–22 should not be reinstated in future years. To some practitioners, therefore, the modifications to course assessment were perceived as beneficial, regardless of COVID disruption.

Learner choice

To a lesser extent, practitioners reported that increasing assignment options for learners worked well in 2021–22. For some courses, learners were given a choice of questions, projects, or portfolio pieces, for example. Practitioners found this beneficial as it, again, allowed for more focused and in-depth teaching and learning. COVID-19 disruption resulted in many learners missing learning opportunities, so having an element of choice meant they were able to focus on their strengths and concentrate on coursework areas that they were most interested in.

I think that giving pupils a choice in the Higher Philosophy Knowledge and Doubt unit was useful as if pupils had absences due to COVID or mental health then they were able to focus on one area for in-depth study which helped them with anxiety and allowed them to demonstrate the skills needed to pass.

Cutting the English folio from two pieces of writing to one with the choice of creative or persuasive, meant pupils could play to their strengths and allowed more class time for teaching of the exam content.

Revision support

Although they were asked about modifications here, many practitioners reported that revision support materials were helpful. Mention was made of the benefit of various forms of revision support, including study guides, advance notice of topics that would or would not be assessed, advance notice of set texts, and learners being able to take study notes into their exams.

Modifications that did not work well

Practitioners were asked about any modifications to course assessment they felt did not work well. Almost 550 respondents submitted comments, although a small proportion gave no information other than suggesting that all modifications had been beneficial. A small number of respondents to this question just stated that modifications had not been required.

Additionally, some of the comments submitted here covered revision support, rather than modifications to course assessment.

There was a wide range of practitioner views in evidence; these were sometimes contradictory. The main themes to emerge in comments around modifications that did not work well were:

- ◆ Modifications had a negative impact.
- ◆ Modifications did not provide enough support.
- ◆ Modifications had little effect on teaching and learning.

Negative impact

The most common theme to emerge here, from more than a third of respondents, was that the modifications had had a negative impact on learners or had the potential to negatively impact learners in the future.

Removal of coursework

Significant numbers of practitioners thought that the removal of coursework, including assignments and projects, from some courses disadvantaged learners. This was for two main reasons: that it disadvantaged lower attaining learners and that it resulted in learners not developing certain key skills.

Firstly, there was a feeling from considerable numbers that the removal of assignments and projects was detrimental to learners who perform poorly in exams. Several respondents were frustrated that, as a result of modifications to course assessment, grades depended entirely on one high-stakes exam.

I feel that the removal of the assignment really impacted our pupil performance because in the past the assignment part had helped boost the attainment of some of our weaker candidates.

Removal of the assignment directly punished learners with ASN.

Without it our course was 100% exam which is not fair for pupils with ASN needs, or pupils suffering from stress/anxiety/mental health.

Several respondents did acknowledge that the removal of assignments had freed up teaching and learning time, but they nevertheless believed it negatively impacted learners.

Secondly, substantial numbers of practitioners suggested that the removal of assignments and projects meant that learners were not developing required skills. A frequent concern was the lack of practical work in the sciences and the subsequent perceived challenges learners had in answering related questions in the exam. Other practitioners, from non-science subjects, highlighted the lack of learner experience in developing key fieldwork, analysis and evaluation techniques.

Sciences are practical subjects and must have more than just practical questions in the final exam. We must be able to send our learners to further education and jobs with the practical skills necessary and without the coursework this is not going to happen.

Missing out on assignments in Chemistry means the pupils are missing vital scientific practical and planning skills that they require in Higher, Advanced Higher and beyond.

Leading into Advanced Higher they don't have enough experience of fieldwork techniques and writing up a report.

Progression issues

A major theme in practitioner comments was that the modifications to course assessment had created progression issues. This was framed both in terms of progression between National Qualification levels — some practitioners suggested learners were already struggling having inappropriately progressed in certain subjects — and post-school progression to further and higher education.

Candidates at Advanced Higher level will really struggle to complete a completely independent project having never completed an assignment. The skills required will only be partially developed and this will have a massive impact on attainment and achievement.

[Modifications] benefitted students in terms of immediate results, however... in the longer term there are now gaps in their knowledge for those taking the subject further.

Making papers easier and lowering grade boundaries will not be helpful for learners in the future.

Removal of assignment at National 5 will potentially impact on pupils at Higher level as they have not had the experience of extended writing.

[Learners now have] unreasonable expectations of success in subsequent courses.

Comments on progression being more challenging covered the perception that wider key skills could not be fully developed, but also included the effect of the omission of specific topics. Several specific issues were raised but the subject most frequently cited by far was that of the removal of vectors from Mathematics.

Entirely removing topics (vectors) will have a knock-on effect in future years.

Removing vectors at National 5/Higher/Advanced Higher negatively impacts on future courses.

Several subject areas found that key content was removed that will prove difficult in future years (eg vectors in Maths).

Students going on to do engineering at college or university missed the opportunity to learn the Higher and Advanced Higher topic of vectors.

Other specific issues that arose were the removal of British Standards from Graphic Communication, the choice between Web Design and Development and Database Design and Development in Computer Science, and insufficient practical skills development in sciences.

Another issue mentioned in this context was the removal of the Added Value Unit at National 4. Whilst some practitioners acknowledged that its removal had freed up teaching and learning time, there was a feeling that this has encouraged inappropriate progression in some cases. Several respondents suggested that without the Added Value Unit, National 4 courses are too short and not sufficiently demanding.

The loss of the Added Value Unit at National 4 Level reduces the rigour of the course and allows the pupils to chunk... and never have to prove knowledge of the full course.

Lack of rigour

This leads on to another significant theme in practitioners' comments, that modifications had reduced rigour and challenge. There were concerns expressed that modifications reduced the validity of and narrowed qualifications, while encouraging rote learning and producing inflated grades in some cases.

What challenge is there?

By requiring pupils to learn less of the course we have lowered their breadth of understanding.

Assessing pupils in one activity is not in line with previous years and does not assess pupil competence in a wide range of skills.

As well as the Added Value Unit point mentioned above, a wide range of specific issues were mentioned by respondents here, but none by large numbers of respondents. The issue that elicited the most responses in this context was the release of the Scottish set text in English. Some thought that this amounted to *spoon feeding* learners, while others suggested that it narrowed learners' revision focus too much.

Telling the pupils which poem they would study felt more like cheating as pupils could go in anticipating every potential question type, so it wasn't a fair assessment.

The removal of the composition unit from Music was also mentioned by several practitioners. Other issues around a perceived reduction in rigour included: subjects where exams had been removed; too detailed advance information; the removal of assignments; and a lack of opportunity for learners to demonstrate the depth of their skills and knowledge. Indeed, an issue raised by a number of respondents was that advance information of exam topics had just resulted in those questions no longer being useful in differentiating learners.

Modifications not appropriate

Another theme to emerge from practitioner comments was that while modifications had been needed in 2021–22, the modifications made by SQA were not appropriate. These respondents identified a range of areas where they believed modifications were not suitable. Several stated what they thought should have happened instead.

Many of the comments related to some of the general issues already raised above. For example, that modifications led to an over-reliance on the exam or had a negative impact on learner development. Several respondents suggested important topics — including those important for progression — had been dropped and should not have been. A small number of practitioners stated that more accessible topics were removed while more challenging ones remained.

A number of more specific issues were raised, but there was generally a lack of consensus on which modifications were not appropriate. The most commonly cited issue was around Music, particularly that of performance timings remaining six minutes instead of eight. Providing advance notification of the Scottish set text in English was also mentioned a number of times.

The reduction in the number of English folio pieces from two to one was mentioned by several respondents. Some suggested this disadvantaged learners and did not allow them to fully demonstrate their attainment or, conversely, made it less challenging for learners and led to inflated grades. In the past, the folio was made up of two pieces, each marked out of 15 to give an overall mark out of 30. This year, the single piece was marked out of 15, and then the mark was doubled to give the required mark out of 30. There was a clear concern from some around this marking method, with questions raised about whether there had been any consideration of developing a new marking scheme out of 30.

Not enough support

Related to the above, a substantial number of practitioners responded that modifications had not offered them sufficient support to address the impact of the pandemic. Many respondents thought, for example, that not enough had been removed from their subjects to take account of the ongoing disruption to learning.

Teachers and pupils were dealing with the impact of missed time in National 5 and Higher courses in previous years and were trying to catch up with that knowledge and skills as well as trying to get to grips with a new course.

The entire course was assessed in the examination without any reduction in content at all - this did not make any allowance for absences due to COVID.

Our only modification was removal of assignment which was not nearly enough to cover all the pupil absences and lack of prior knowledge due to previous year's disruption.

Practitioners from a range of subjects were frustrated by their perception that they had not been offered enough support through modifications. This was particularly true of respondents who taught subjects where course content had not been reduced, especially the science subjects.

Science was particularly at a disadvantage as there were no modifications to course content.

Too much content in Chemistry subjects. We were made to feel like we were the most unattainable subject on offer this year due to no content being removed at all.

There were no other changes to Physics course content. This re-enforced the view that Physics is a hard subject which may have the impact of lowering numbers of people choosing to study physics.

Other subjects cited by a number of practitioners as not having had extensive enough modifications to assessment included Drama, English, Design and Manufacture, Practical Cookery, and History.

Inconsistencies

Considerable numbers of respondents felt strongly that modifications were not consistent across subjects and that this was unfair. Many practitioners felt that modifications in their own subject compared unfavourably to modifications in others.

Massive inconsistency across the range of subjects.

I ... feel that it was unwise that some subjects had huge chunks of content removed and other subjects did not, comparatively.

There was a disparity between subjects and courses in that some seemed to get more modification than others.

This concern was expressed about a range of subjects (for example, Business Management, Drama, Modern Studies, and Politics) but most frequently raised by those in science subjects. As noted above, many of these practitioners did not feel that they had received enough support, particularly compared to other subjects. However, within this, there was also some disquiet that Biology had received more support than Chemistry and Physics.

Some practitioners in subjects where coursework had been reinstated since 2020–21 felt that this was unfair, as this had not happened across all subjects. Related to this, a small number of practitioners specifically stated that they were unhappy with the removal of the exam for Practical Woodworking and Practical Metalworking.

Modifications still required teaching the full course

Many respondents suggested that the modifications to assessment had little effect on teaching and learning. This was because the whole content of the course still needed to be covered as it is essential in developing learners' understanding.

The content that was taken out and not being assessed still needed to be taught in order for learners to understand the topic.

I feel that it was relatively pointless reducing the folio piece to one essay, as we still had to teach all styles of writing so that pupils could make an informed choice as to their preferred/stronger genre.

Pupils did have a choice, but all content still needed to be covered to allow this choice.

The removal of assignments/Added Value Unit did not free up any additional teaching time as we were still expected to complete full course coverage including practical activities in the sciences.

Some respondents mentioned that while modifications may have helped learners target their revision, they did not impact positively on teacher workload. A small number of practitioners mentioned that modifications changing between 2020–21 and 2021–22 increased teacher workload. A couple mentioned that different modifications for different levels had not worked in bi-level classes.

Other issues

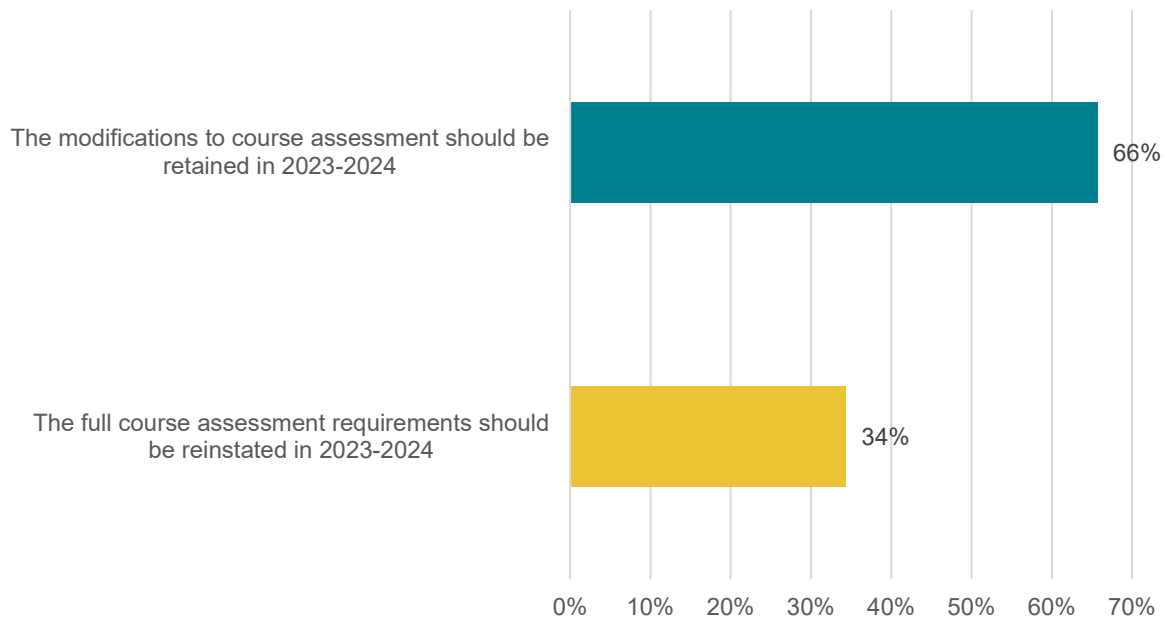
Other issues mentioned by smaller numbers of practitioners were that the modifications were not clear, particularly what would and would not be assessed and optionality, and that some modifications were communicated too late, after topics had been covered. Small numbers of respondents raised issues unrelated to modifications, including the revision support study guides, appeals, grade boundaries, and the length of science exams.

Modifications in the future

Practitioners were asked what their preferred option was regarding modifications in the 2023–24 academic year; two-thirds of respondents thought that the modifications to course assessment should be retained and a third thought that the full course assessment requirements should be reinstated.

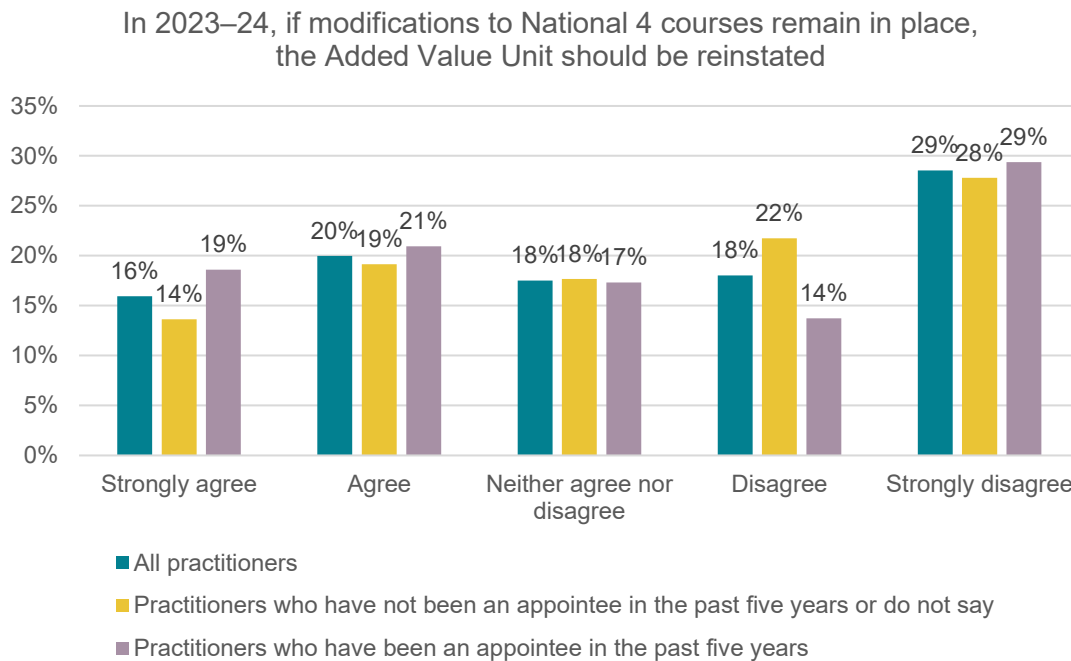
Figure 17

SQA is considering whether to keep modifications for the 2023–24 academic year. What is your preferred option for 2023–24?



Almost half (47%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that, if modifications to National 4 courses remain in place, the Added Value Unit should be reinstated, 36% agreed or strongly agreed that it should be reinstated, and 18% neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 18



$$\chi^2(4) = 13.52, p = 0.01$$

Table 2 Standardised residuals for *In 2023–24, if modifications to National 4 courses remain in place, the Added Value Unit should be reinstated*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.35	-0.43	0.09	2.04	-0.32
Appointees in the past five years	1.45	0.46	-0.10	-2.19	0.34

Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests that significance is being driven by fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Disagree' than would be expected by chance, and more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Disagree' than would be expected by chance. This pattern is reversed (although not significantly) for the 'Strongly agree' option.

Practitioner interviews

As part of the in-depth interviews, practitioners were asked for their views on modifications to assessment. They were asked whether the modifications were beneficial in 2022, and whether they believed that modifications should be retained in 2023–24. The impact of modifications on teaching was also explored.

There was a range of views, but, in general, practitioners felt that many of the modifications to assessment had proved useful and should be retained on a permanent basis. There were concerns about the impact of certain modifications on learners, and there was support for modifications being removed where there was evidence that they were not in the best interests of learners.

It should be noted that many practitioners conflated modifications and revision support. When analysing the results of these interviews, wherever possible, we have endeavoured to understand whether practitioners were actually referring to modifications or to revision support, and to analyse their responses accordingly.

Types of modifications

The modifications to assessment that were most frequently cited by practitioners could be grouped under the headings of removing assessment components and reducing areas that would be assessed. In some cases, respondents also mentioned changes in the rules for assessments, particularly for more practical assessments.

It was consistent across the sciences, and they removed the assignments at National 5 and Higher level with the project going at Advanced Higher level.

Well, last year I was largely teaching Sociology and I would say the modifications were tremendously helpful. It basically meant that the young people were going to be examined on two of the three potential units that would normally be in the final course paper.

... there were elements such as shortened amount of performance time, recommended numbers of group levels and some tweaks made to some of the design elements of what you could do.

Impact on teaching

While modifications were made to assessment, SQA did not remove any content from National Courses, and suggested that practitioners should continue to deliver the full course content to allow learners the opportunity to develop the full range of skills, knowledge and understanding. Interviews explored the extent to which teachers were able to do that, given the ongoing disruption that many schools and colleges continued to face.

As was the case when a similar question was asked in the questionnaire, some practitioners managed to teach the course in full, while others felt that they were able to make some attempt to cover all areas, but did not go into the same depth in areas that would not be assessed.

I did actually teach the things that were taken out and my kids could answer questions on them, either because of the bi-level nature or because I just thought they had a better chance of doing well in that question than they would in an extra question that was perhaps from an area of the course that they find more challenging.

When I did appeasement on the road to war for Higher, I would normally do key issue 6 which is reasons why appeasement fails and World War Two starts. I wasn't able to do that to the same kind of level I would normally do.

Other practitioners did not cover areas that would not be assessed.

Especially because of disruptions to the school year and ongoing issues and we had members of staff on maternity leave, we were still very much teaching to the modifications last year. I would say this year that's our minimum the modifications, but we are now kind of trying to push kids to achieve a little bit more of this year.

But generally, most of my staff... for example, I think Psychology is a good example... The two optional units were removed and the two compulsory units stayed. We don't teach the optional units, we just focused on the compulsory units and the assignment.

Usefulness of modifications

As would be expected, given the variety of modifications, there were a range of views on their usefulness. A significant number of teachers felt that modifications that reduced the breadth of the topics to be assessed were beneficial to learners, as they allowed for greater depth of skills and knowledge to be demonstrated.

I will certainly say it's a good thing the assignment has been axed and in ours one extra question will be asked at the essay paper. I think that is a good thing and in 2021–22 and this year, it just gives candidates a little bit more choice and it really allows us to actually examine their history ... so it does feel fairer and a much more reflective exam.

Yes, they were extremely helpful and I would say in particular the fact that the composing assignment was completely dropped. And so what tends to happen is we can't do everything. And so composing is very often the element of the course that we just don't teach. We just don't physically have enough time. There is far too much.

I felt it was incredibly helpful. It meant that pupils could spend more time trying to understand the work of the philosopher that they had chosen, and it paid dividends in their confidence and in their ability to do it.

Other participants welcomed the additional time that was freed up because there was not a need to work on assignments or other components that would not be assessed.

Obviously the assignments take a period of time to do so it kind of gave us that extra couple of weeks that we would have lost over the period of assignments.

Finally, some respondents felt that changes to rules that were originally made due to COVID-19 were still useful as we emerge from the pandemic.

The impact of not having the two-year rule for their performance analysis, of being able to go on to national or digital theatre online and just find a play that they might find interesting. That was really useful.

Where respondents felt that modifications were not helpful, in general, the main reasons for this were that the modifications meant that learners did not have the full skillset that they would require for future progression, or that the skills that were not assessed were important to the qualification.

At Advanced Higher, it was significant because the entire project makes up quite a bit for Chemistry and I think it's a shame for the pupils to lose out on those skills.

I think what we are finding is the lack of that practical skills are still showing.

I don't think they got the same experience, you know, they didn't build the same set of competencies because a lot of what you're doing when you're in the classroom is group stuff. They're getting them to work together on things. You're getting them to interact with each other.

I felt that taking the coursework out and leaving it out of Advanced Higher has been a huge loss to the course as Advanced Highers are meant to be quite practical.

So the modification of no talk assessment. So that's for English National 5 and Higher. We used to have to do that throughout the year and give them a pass or fail at talk. I thought it was a very important part of the course because it made us make ask them to do individual presentations and group discussion.

Future of modifications

Overall, practitioners had a nuanced view on the future of modifications. Some felt that the modifications in their subjects were beneficial and should be extended or made permanent. These tended to be in subjects where teachers felt that a reduction in the content being assessed was valuable because it allowed for better coverage of the remaining content.

I like the modifications that were made. I don't think they were onerous. I don't think they were difficult, and I think they've had benefits to our pupils and have made things... I don't want to say easy because easy is not the right word... but it made it a little bit easier for them to focus on what they need to do and therefore achieve their potential.

The Advanced Higher ones, the modifications for it was the two of the content areas got axed. So it was 8 instead of 10 topics that were getting assessed. And I love that. It's so good. Please don't take it away.

Another respondent felt that to return to the pre-pandemic arrangements would be damaging to dyslexic students.

But also, I find generally the assessments disproportionately penalise students with dyslexia because they struggle to do the write up in a way which reflects their understanding.

Many teachers, particularly when looking at the issue across subjects, took a relatively nuanced view which recognised that some modifications had a more positive impact than others, and that a uniform approach would not be beneficial.

I think what we need to do is consult teachers on what modifications and whatever they ultimately decide.

I think it needs to be on a case-by-case basis.

With Classics if they re-introduced the things that were missing, it wouldn't be the end of the world, but I do strongly feel it's a case-by-case subject because some subjects were in a mess before.

Other practitioners argued that there were still significant impacts due to the pandemic. This can be either a result of ongoing disruption, or, more frequently, the cumulative impact of the disruption and impact on mental health that young people have faced.

Potentially partly in place, I think. Whatever we're doing in schools to mitigate against the effects of the pandemic, young people have changed and we've had to change and we've had to probably be much more flexible in our approach. I'm not necessarily advocating that we maintain the modifications forever, but I would probably say there's a bit of a hybrid to be had before we revert back to full course paper, full assignment.

We need some sort of modification. We're certainly finding this year that our S4s are really struggling with the demands of National Qualifications, to be honest.

Some respondents argued that some or all of the modifications should now be removed.

I am wary that the assignment element does take a huge amount of time to be done well. But I am really wary of just it being cut completely for another year because we have been in school and those are really important skills.

I would be quite happy if the assignments didn't come back for National 5 and the Higher, but we really need them in the Advanced Higher.

I think if I am totally honest, I think if the qualifications are to maintain that kind of the standards that they have or that they've had, I don't think the modifications can stay in place.

I think this year we've still got the modifications in and I would like to go back to two pieces of writing. And I think the talk should come back because I know what's happened. People are just not doing it because you don't have to. But it's still a skill.

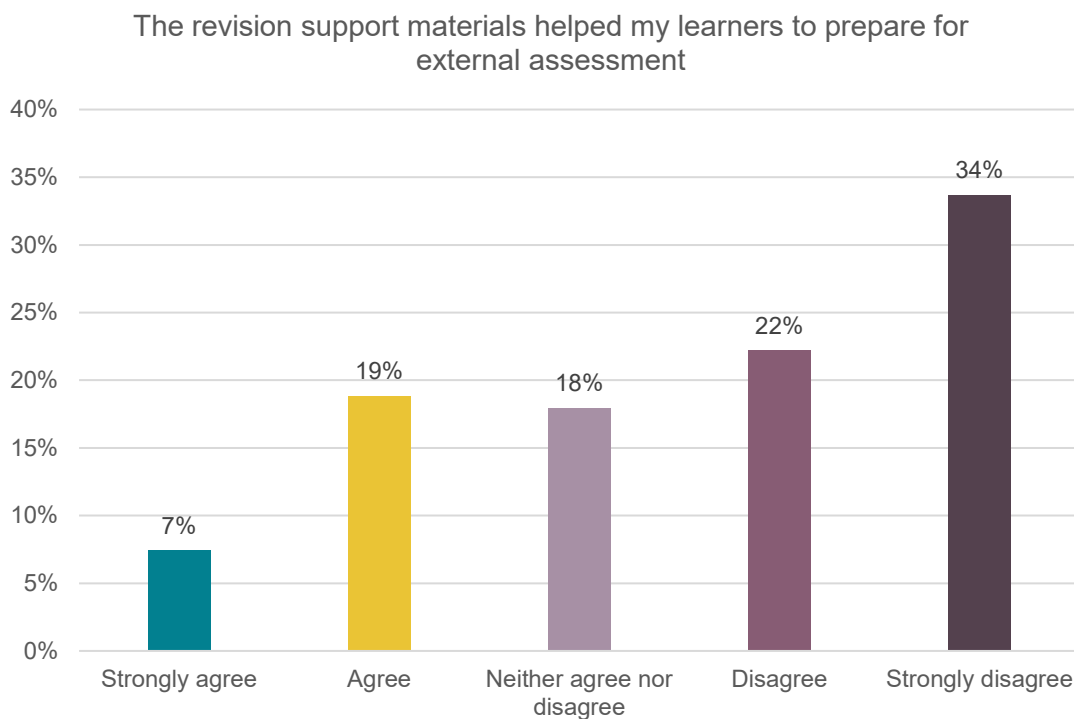
5 Revision support

This section looks at practitioners' views on the revision support provided by SQA in 2021–22. (More information on revision support is available on [our website](#).)

Practitioners were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements on revision support.

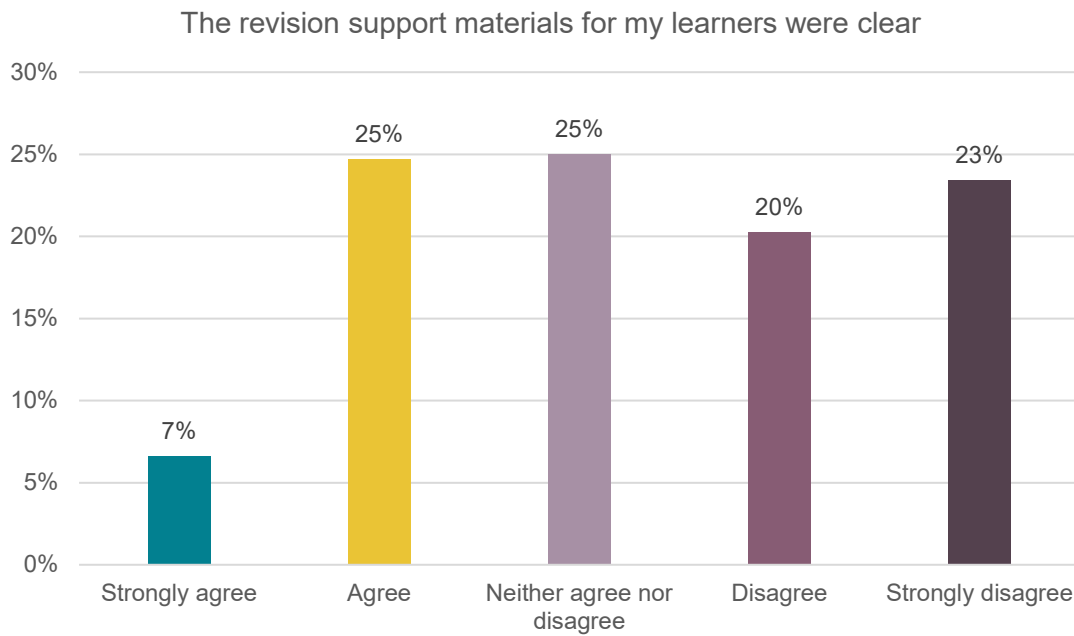
Just over a quarter (26%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the revision support materials had helped their learners to prepare for external assessment, but 56% disagreed or strongly disagreed (with more than a third strongly disagreeing), and 18% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 19



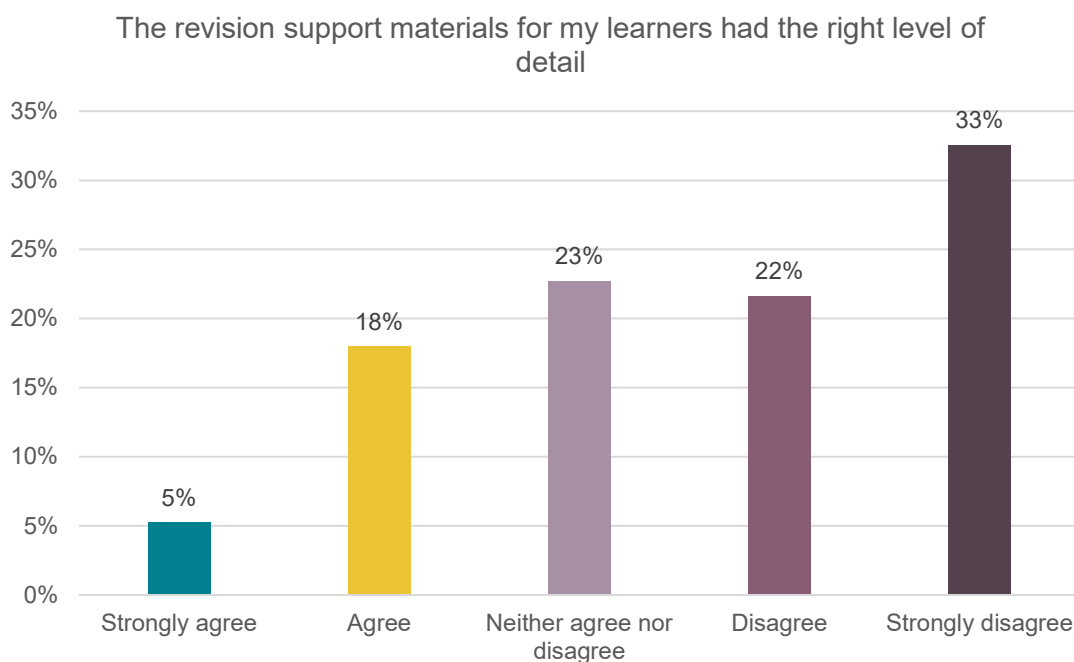
While, as shown in Figure 20, 7% of practitioners strongly agreed and 25% agreed that the revision support materials were clear, 20% disagreed and 23% strongly disagreed. A quarter of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 20



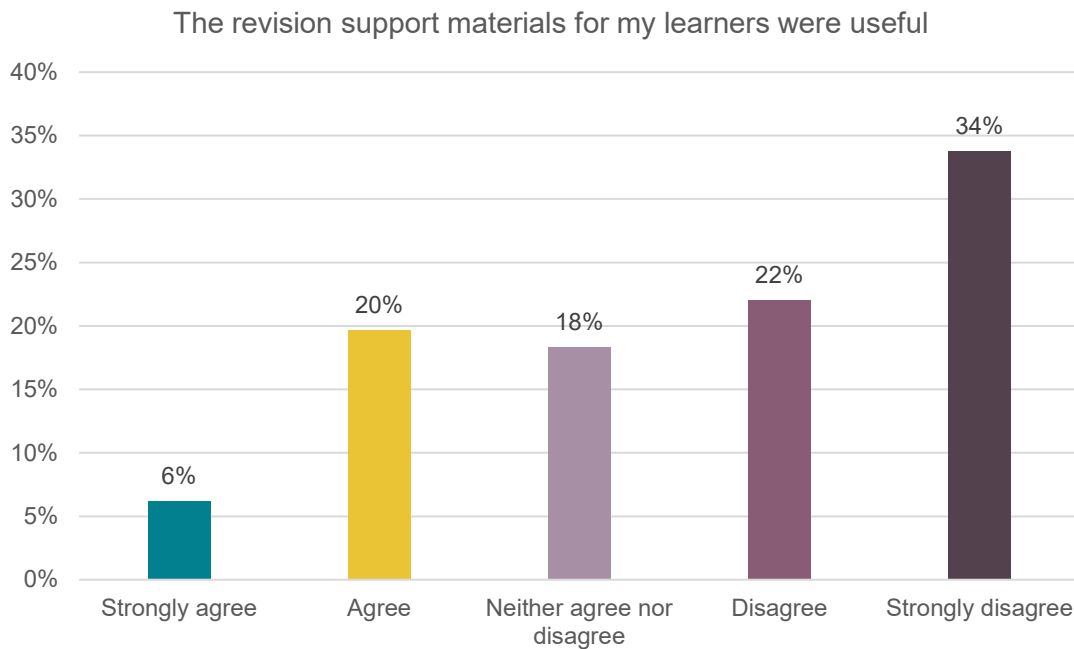
A third of practitioners strongly disagreed that the revision support materials had the right level of detail and 22% disagreed; 23% agreed or strongly agreed and 23% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 21



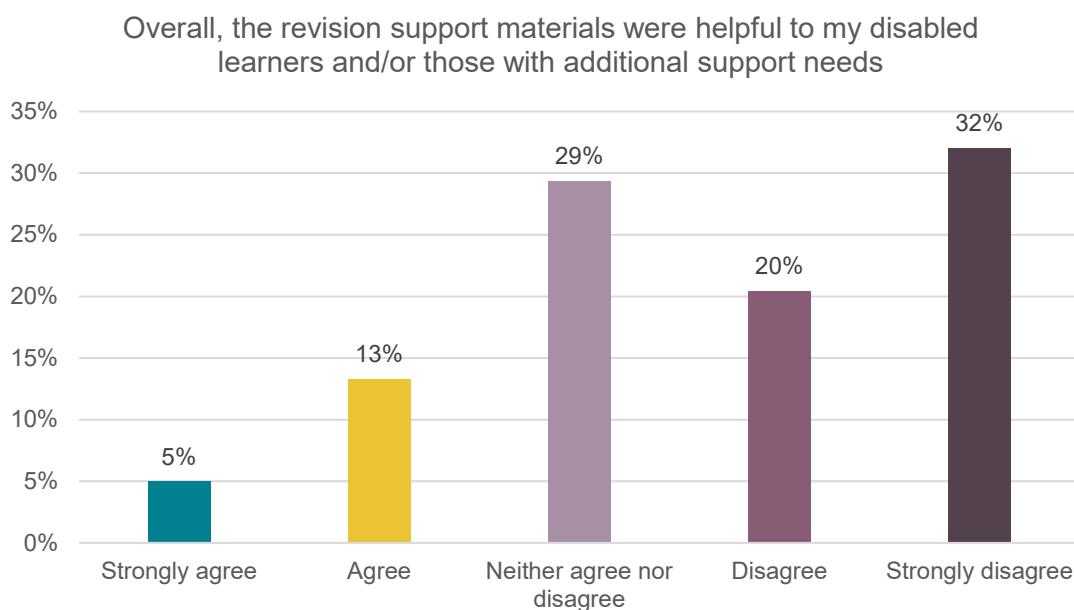
When asked if they agreed that the revision support materials were useful for their learners, 34% of respondents strongly disagreed, 22% disagreed, 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, 20% agreed, and 6% strongly agreed.

Figure 22



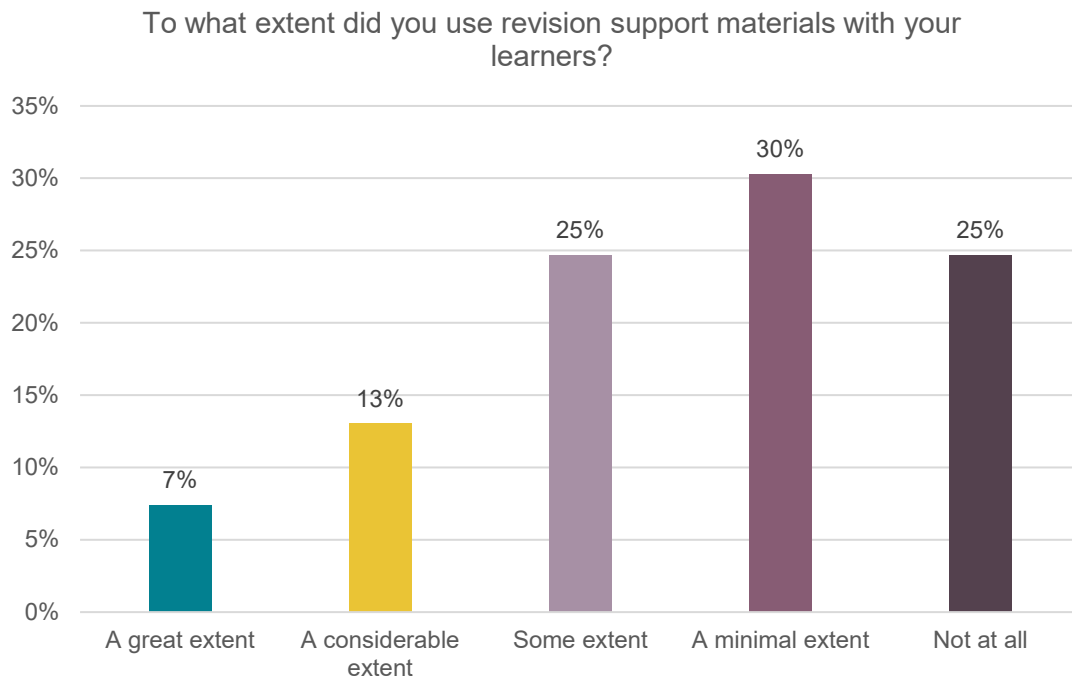
When asked their level of agreement with the statement that overall, the revision support materials were helpful to their disabled learners and/or those with ASN, more than half (52%) of practitioners disagreed or strongly disagreed, 18% agreed or strongly agreed, and 29% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 23



Practitioners were asked the extent to which they used the revision support materials with their learners: 7% used the materials to a great extent; 13% to a considerable extent; 25% to some extent; 30% to a minimal extent; and 25% did not use the materials at all.

Figure 24



What other support could have been provided?

Respondents were informed that any support that SQA offers to learners has to be provided in a way that ensures skills and knowledge are rigorously assessed. Given this, respondents were asked what other support SQA could have provided if any. A total of 475 practitioners left comments. It should be noted that a number of respondents thought that either revision support had not been required at all or that there was nothing more that SQA could have provided.

It should also be noted that, as with other questions, there was an element of conflation between revision support and modifications in responses. Moreover, many of the respondents commented on wider issues covered elsewhere in the survey, such as their feelings on the 2021–22 approach to assessment, the advantages of different assessment models, disruption to learning, and the appeals process.

Around a fifth of the respondents to this question offered criticisms of the revision support provided in 2021–22 rather than suggesting other support that SQA could have provided. There was a perception from many practitioners that the revision support provided by SQA was nothing that subject teachers would not already provide as a matter of course. For these respondents, the support was deemed to be minimal, too general, and not particularly helpful for learners. Some thought the revision support was patronising or insulting to practitioners and learners.

The support offered was the same as the teaching support I have offered in class for years.

There wasn't a single piece of advice in them that I haven't routinely taught my pupils as a matter of doing my job.

The revision notes only highlighted what the course modifications already told us.

The support provided was entirely vague and non-specific.

On a related note, around a fifth of respondents here also thought that the revision support should have comprised more detailed guidance. Many of these respondents thought that the revision support was too vague or generic, that it could have been more meaningful and clearer had it included information on specific topics to be assessed, rather than broad contexts. There was a call for detailed guidance signposting learners and enabling them to target their revision.

A much clearer list in a learner-friendly format of what was going to be assessed from the course specification.

More detailed revision materials. It's pointless just rehashing the course specifications.

Many respondents thought that the provision of exemplars or more practice papers and questions would have benefitted learners. A few called for more Understanding Standards materials and events.

Support could have included practice questions, example answers etc.

More past papers or created papers for revision.

There should be a worked example of every possible SQA knowledge question that could be asked.

Clear examples for each topic and skill to be assessed of what a good answer should look like.

Related to this, a number of respondents suggested that SQA should have a bank of questions for centres to use or that they should provide centres with a standard prelim paper.

Considerable numbers of respondents were frustrated at what they saw as inconsistencies between different subjects in terms of the revision support provided (and, relatedly, the modifications made to course assessment). There was exasperation expressed at the perception that some subjects received useful, detailed guidance, while others received very little.

There appeared to be no parity between subjects.

The quality of the revision support varied widely across subject areas.

This issue was perhaps particularly raised regarding perceived inconsistencies between the different science subjects and between the different social science subjects.

There was also a theme from a substantial number of respondents that information was not shared with centres early enough. A number suggested that they had already created their own revision support by the time SQA's was published or had covered topics in detail before finding out that they would not be assessed. While some of these comments did refer to revision support, others concerned the modifications to assessment, with practitioners stating that they needed such information at the beginning of a course, in May.

The detail wasn't the problem, the timing was the issue. It was too late.

A number of respondents made subject-specific comments; again, not always with reference to revision support, but also to modifications and wider issues around assessment models and course content. Examples of suggestions here included allowing learners to take their texts and quotations into English exams and reducing the length of science subject exams. Small numbers of practitioners also suggested online revision support, including videos and quizzes.

Revision support that worked well

Respondents were asked about any revision support they thought had worked particularly well. While 365 practitioners commented, more than 50 of these just said the question was not applicable. Furthermore, of the remainder, just under half suggested that none of the revision support had worked well. These respondents stated that they had not found SQA's support useful and instead had used resources produced in-centre or shared through professional networks; a couple mentioned BBC Bitesize and e-Sgoil.

Of those respondents who did find elements of the revision support useful, knowing what topics would or would not be assessed was deemed valuable by the most practitioners; this meant that learners could target their revision.

Prior knowledge of topics which would not be assessed enabled learners to focus their revision.

All my subjects were given were the list of topics that were to be assessed. This worked well as pupils could focus revising these topics.

Detailed information about what was not going to be assessed ensured learners used time effectively on topics they would be assessed on.

Smaller numbers of respondents highlighted signposted past papers, study guides, Understanding Standards, and course content documents as having been useful. A small number of respondents also suggested that the modifications, such as reduced course content and the removal of the assignment, had worked well.

While a number of specific subjects were highlighted in the comments, English revision support elicited by far the most comments. In particular, practitioners found that prior notice

of the Scottish set text extract allowed learners to focus their revision while still ensuring a rigorous assessment. The only other subjects deemed by more than five respondents as having had particularly useful revision support were Biology (the extended response topic information) and Drama (the provision of stimuli for National 5).

Revision support that did not work well

Respondents were asked about any revision support they thought did not work well. While 417 practitioners commented, more than 30 of these said that the question was not applicable. Moreover, of the remainder, more than 10% just stated that they thought that none of SQA's revision support had worked well.

Of those who submitted more detailed comments, many of the threads that emerged were interconnected. The main theme — from around a quarter of respondents — was that practitioners had not found the revision support helpful. These respondents suggested that the revision support did not offer any new information or meaningful support and, in some cases, was a repetition of the course specification document or the modifications to course assessment.

The revision support guide was a copy of the course specification that pupils have already seen.

The revision support mostly reiterated the course modifications which learners already knew about.

On a related note, significant numbers of respondents said that they did not need or had not used the revision support provided because it was information that practitioners routinely provide to learners as part of their professional practice.

The SQA support was unnecessary as teachers already provided the support.

I feel that the revision support provided was something that most teachers already provide to their pupils, prior to the final exams. It is part of a teacher's responsibility to ensure that this done.

Indeed, given their views that it is good practice to share such information with learners, a considerable number of practitioners thought that the revision support was insulting or patronising, either to practitioners or to learners. Several practitioners specifically singled out the study guides for criticism.

Frankly insulting to teachers who spend their entire year teaching pupils the types of advice you gave them.

Patronising to assume that teachers had not already detailed this information to learners.

Generic statements eg, 'read all questions carefully' are already standard protocols. This is not useful advice.

Another theme that emerged was that the revision support had not been clear or detailed enough to be worthwhile. While some practitioners thought that the information had not been user friendly or accessible to learners, others thought it was vague, generic, and lacking in clarity. For these respondents, the revision support was at best pointless and at worst actively confusing.

Too vague and led to some clarifications being required.

The support materials were not easily accessed and were not suitable for all pupils.

On a related note, a considerable number of respondents thought that the revision support did not have enough content and, as touched on above, was lacking in useful detail. Moreover, the perceived inconsistency in revision support provision between different subjects was again raised by several respondents. A few respondents suggested that the revision support had been released too late and a small number suggested that they had affected the rigour of the qualification.

Conversely, a small number of respondents stated that they were happy with the revision support and that there was nothing about it that had not worked well.

We all - SQA included - did the best we could under some very exceptional and bizarre circumstances.

Practitioner interviews

Practitioners stated that a range of different types of revision support were given in different subjects. Many stated that the only revision support provided was either general guidance on exam technique or subject-specific guidance that teachers would likely already have shared with learners.

The advice that we got was like read the question, look at the number of marks. It didn't give them any more help than you what a good chemistry teacher would have been telling them in class anyway.

In some other subjects, guidance was given on areas that would either be assessed or would not be assessed.

The revision support was useful. It was largely sort of directing young people to certain areas.

Usefulness of revision support

In general, teachers in subjects where only guidance was provided did not find the revision support to be useful. There was a perception that the information contained in such guidance would already have been shared with learners by most teachers.

I know it's maybe harder because we didn't have those extended questions in Chemistry, but I think they felt that the additional support in March wasn't actually additional support.

The perception of languages can often be it's difficult, and if the study support is so general that it doesn't really help the people, that just adds to that.

There was also a feeling that March was not the most useful time to provide revision support, as teachers had covered most or all of the course and were focused on revision. In cases where information was provided on the contents of assessment, practitioners felt that this information would have been more useful at an earlier stage.

When the study support packs came out, I think we all felt this is not the ideal time for that to happen, like could have been earlier would maybe have been better. March was not ideal.

Where more information was given on the content of assessments, this was generally perceived to have been of some use, although the extent of this varied.

What I really found useful was getting the stimuli in advance. ... it was good to be able to work with them. I felt the quality of what they were producing, the actual scenarios they were coming up and their practice answers were better because they could base it on something there.

They were helpful to the extent that I built that support into my revision for the pupils. So, when we're doing revision, I drew their attention to the specific SQA support materials we went through in a class.

While views varied significantly across different subjects, depending on the revision support that was provided, the overall impression was that the revision support was not as comprehensive or useful as it might have been.

Impact on teaching

Respondents who taught subjects where revision support was largely or exclusively made up of general guidance on how to successfully complete assessments made little use of the revision support, as they felt that it was of little value. However, in other cases, teachers did adjust their practice as a result.

We used some of that time to put on additional support sessions and so I'm sure loads of schools have got this now as well. We've got Teams for our seniors, so we posted the work on Teams with examples.

And I would say for Sociology... that it gave the young people a good steer on where to focus their attention for the question paper and I think that it probably just built a bit of confidence.

In general, practitioners felt that learners did not make much direct use of the revision support, although this did vary depending on the subject being taught and the support provided. In most cases where the revision support proved useful, this was through teachers adjusting the revision that they did with learners in class.

In English, they absolutely did because they all knew the poem ... So they all knew and they did their notes for Advanced Higher and things like that.

For Classics and Psychology, the pupils were very disappointed at the lack of help. They also thought they were going to get more and that will have come from staff as well.

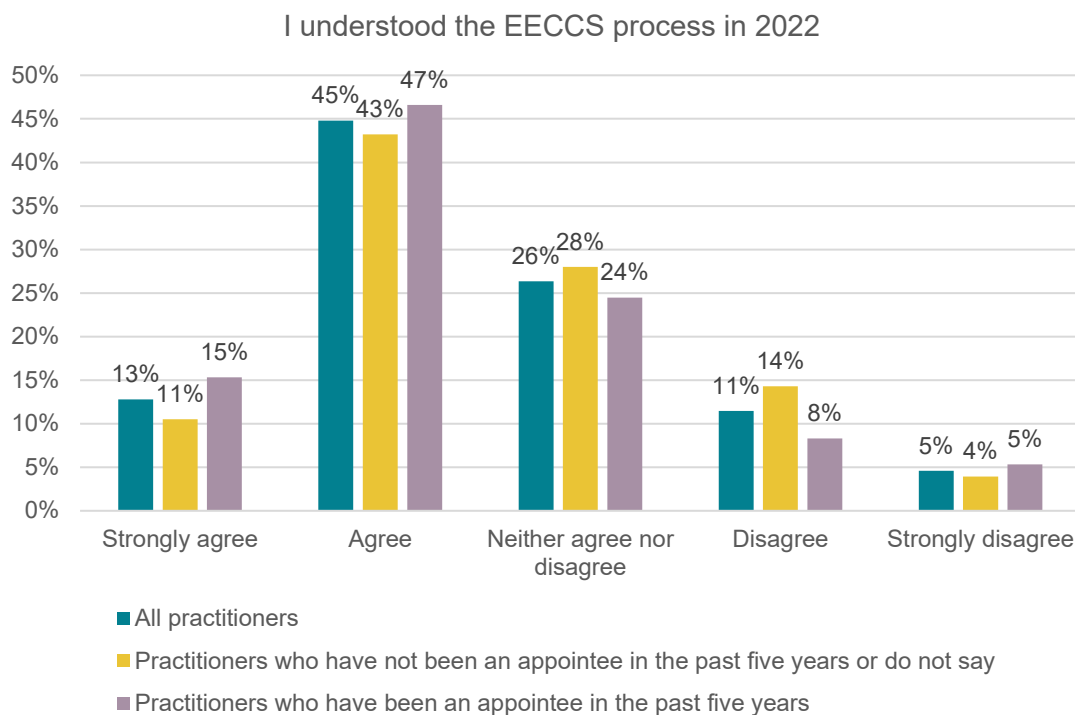
If it was just left as a tool for pupils to kind of access and use, I don't think that that would have been as successful, but I certainly spent time in my school going through it, so when we're revising all the units think it worked very well.

None of our learners directly accessed that support themselves.

6 Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS)

While 58% of practitioner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they understood the exceptional circumstances (EECCS) process in 2022, 26% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 16% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 25



$$\chi^2(4) = 15.12, p = 0.004$$

Table 3 Standardised residuals for I understood the EECCS process in 2022

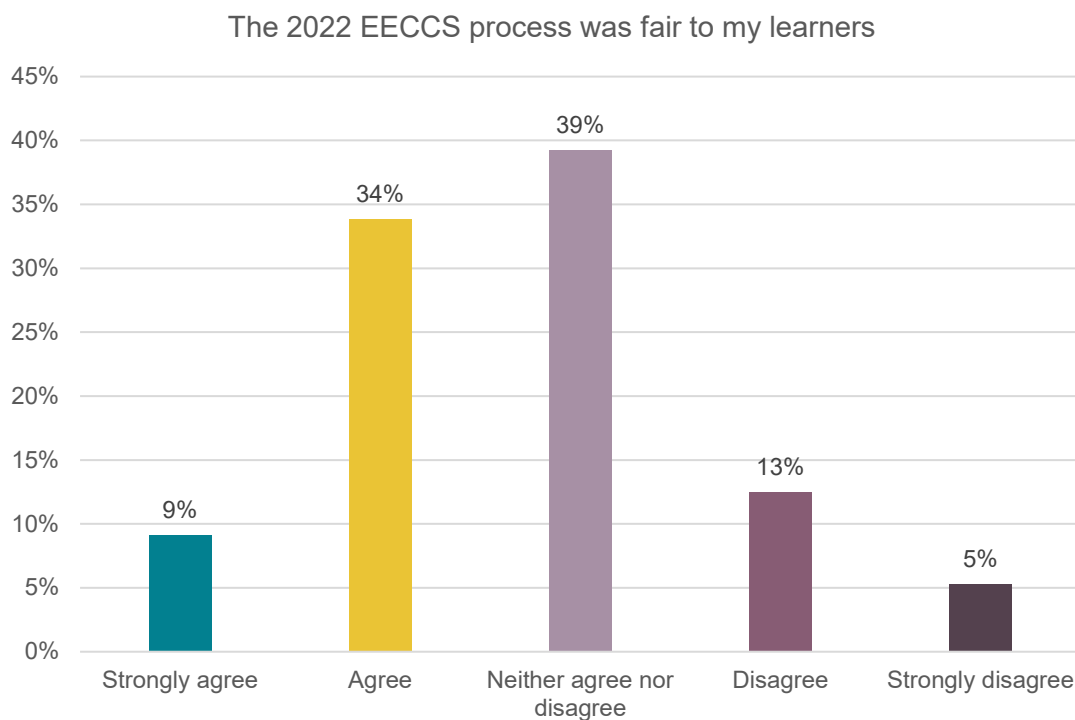
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.45	-0.54	0.75	1.91	-0.69
Appointees in the past five years	1.54	0.58	-0.79	-2.03	0.74

Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests significance is being driven by fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Disagree' than

expected by chance. Overall patterns of results suggest further that more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years than chance would predict are selecting 'Disagree'; and that more practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years and fewer practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance are selecting 'Strongly agree' — although these latter results are not in themselves significant.

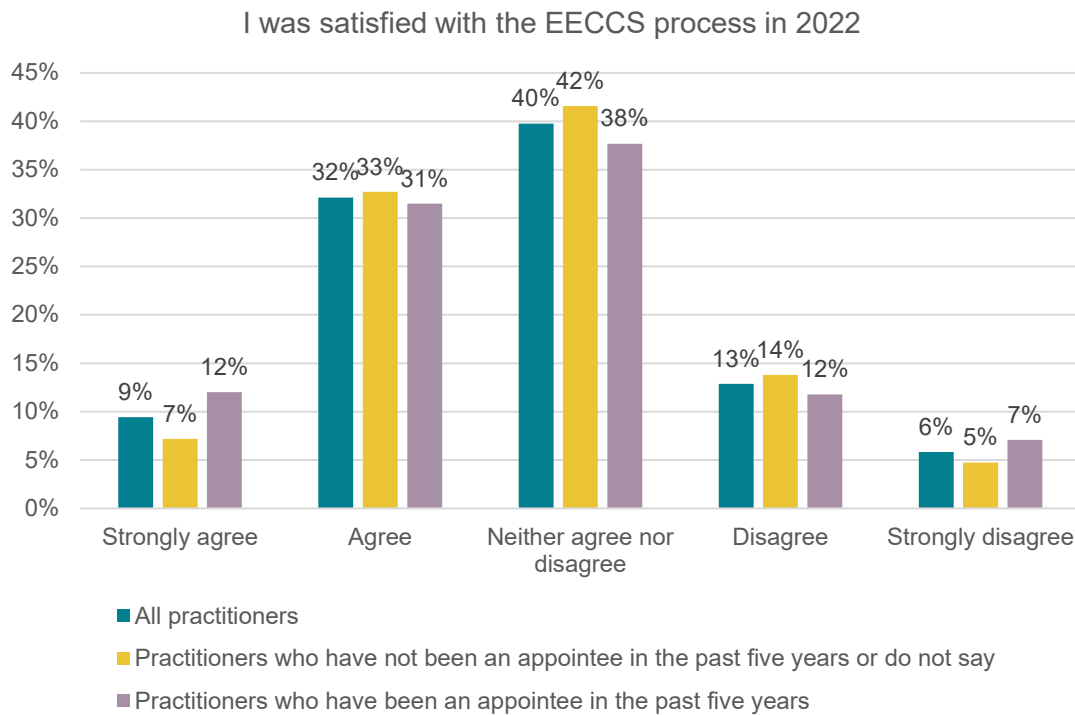
Meanwhile, 43% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the 2022 EECCS process was fair to their learners and 18% disagreed or strongly disagreed. However, 39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 26



While 42% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the EECCS process in 2022, 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 40% neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 27



$$\chi^2(4) = 10.26, p = 0.04$$

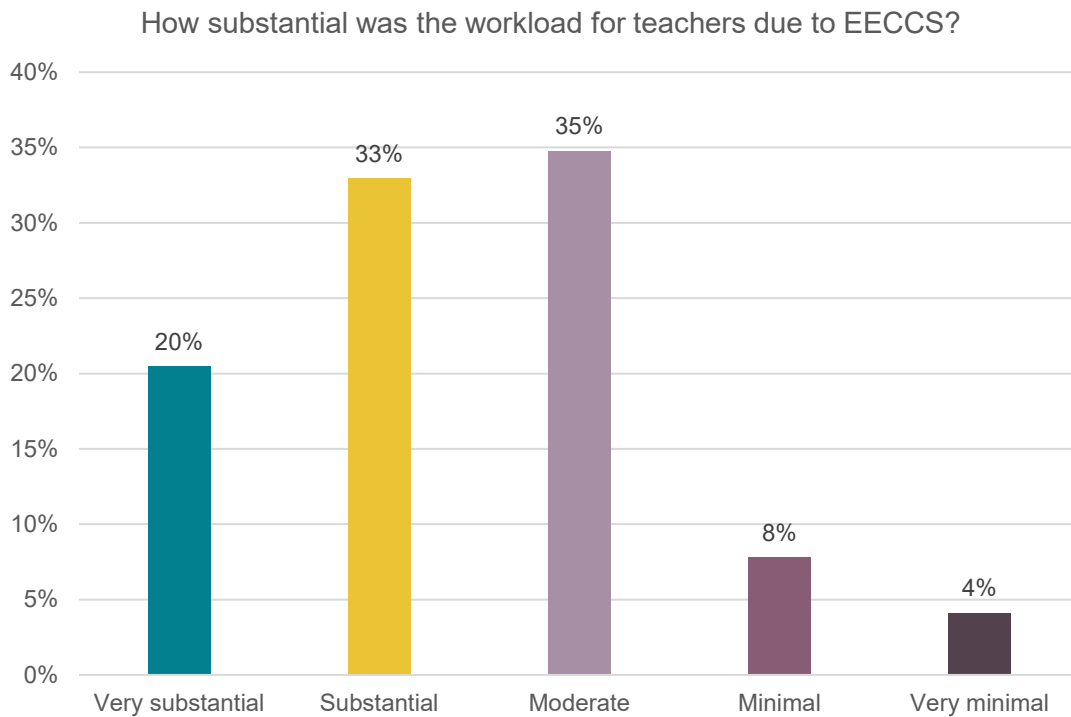
Table 4 Standardised residuals for I was satisfied with the EECCS process in 2022

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.69	0.23	0.67	0.61	-1.05
Appointees in the past five years	1.80	-0.25	-0.71	-0.65	1.11

Inspection of the standardised residuals does not suggest that any particular cell or cells are driving this effect. The overall pattern of results suggests that more practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance are selecting 'Strongly Agree' to this question, while fewer practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years are doing so. This pattern is reversed for 'Strongly disagree'.

When asked about the workload for teachers due to EECCS, 20% of practitioners said it was very substantial, 33% said substantial, 35% said moderate, 8% said minimal, and 4% said very minimal.

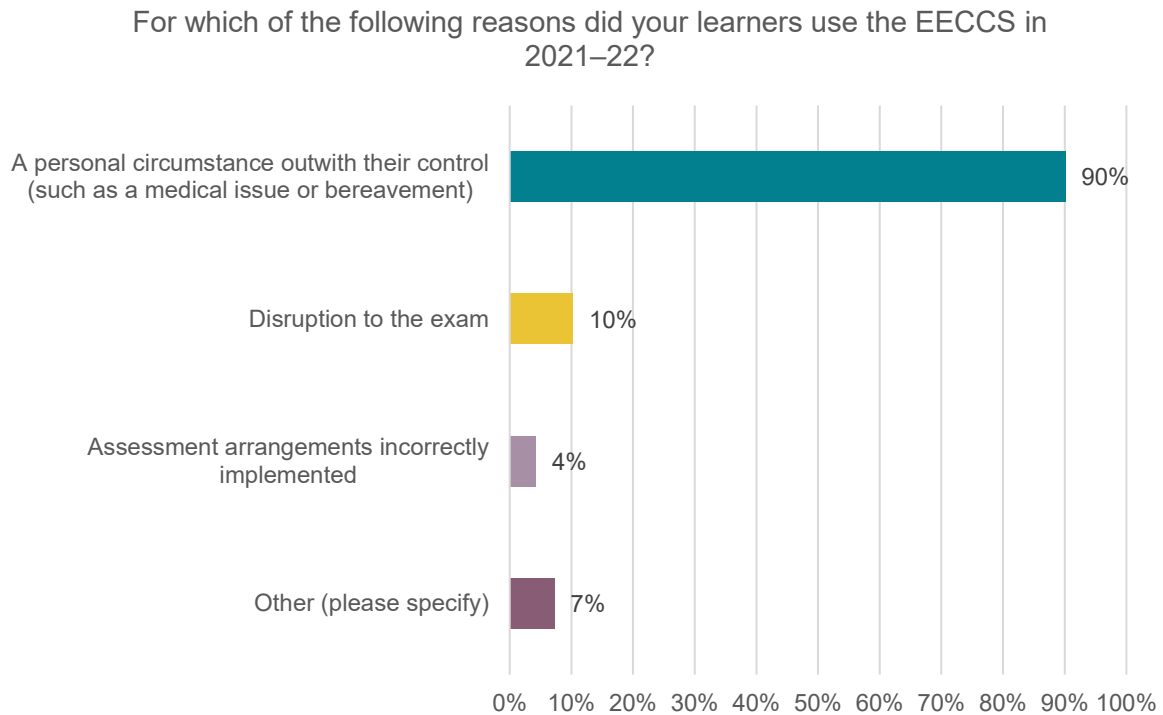
Figure 28



When asked if they had had to use the EECCS for any of their learners in 2022, 46% of practitioners said yes and 54% said no.

Those respondents who had used the EECCS were asked for the reasons for this. They could choose more than one option. The vast majority (90%) said that they had used the EECCS because of a personal circumstance outwith the learner's control (such as a medical issue or bereavement), 10% said they had used it because of disruption to the exam, and 4% cited assessment arrangements incorrectly implemented.

Figure 29



Of those who chose 'other' here, six respondents cited reasons that would fall under personal circumstance and five gave details on disruption to the exam. Another five respondents specifically highlighted disruption due to COVID-19. A couple of practitioners stated they used the EECCS because of a local authority or parent request. Seven respondents said that they had used the EECCS because the evidence supported a higher grade and four made reference to appeals, rather than EECCS.

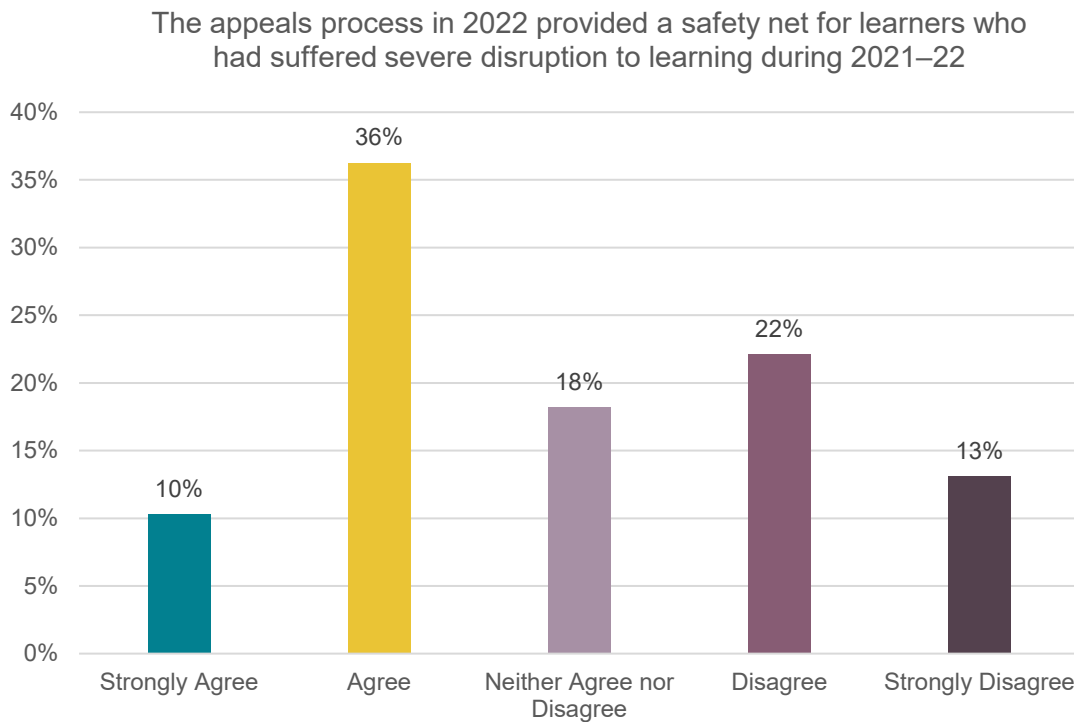
7 Appeals

When practitioner survey respondents were asked if their learners had made an appeal in 2022, 82% said yes and 18% said no. Of those whose learners had made appeals, 97% said that their learners had received the results of their appeal.

Only 2% of respondents said that they had submitted appeals on the grounds of discrimination under the Equality Act (2010) or agreed assessment arrangements not being provided in internal assessments.

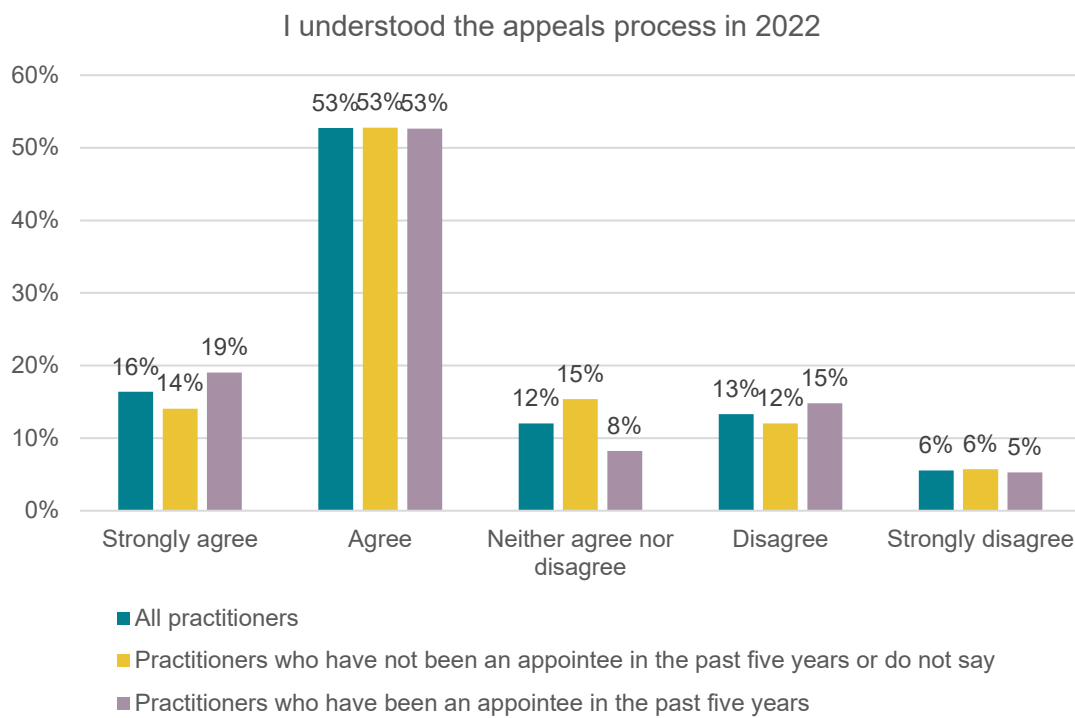
When asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement *The appeals process in 2022 provided a safety net for learners who had suffered severe disruption to learning during 2021–22*, 46% of responding practitioners either agreed or strongly agreed, whilst 35% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Figure 30



All practitioners were then asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement *I understood the appeals process in 2022*. A total of 69% of practitioners either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and 19% disagreed or strongly disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 31



$$\chi^2(4) = 15.94, p = 0.003$$

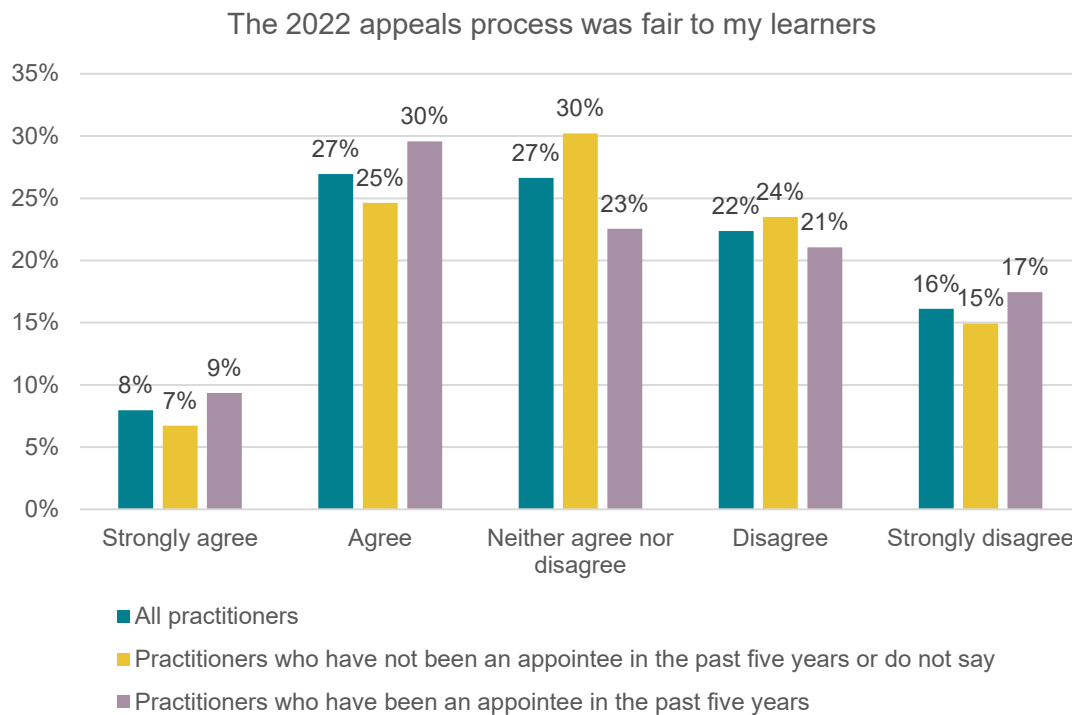
Table 5 Standardised residuals for *I understood the appeals process in 2022*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.33	0.02	2.23	-0.82	0.21
Appointees in the past five years	1.42	-0.02	-2.38	0.88	-0.22

Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests that significance is being driven by more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years and fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Neither agree nor disagree' than expected by chance. The overall pattern of results further suggests that this pattern is reversed for 'Strongly agree', although this is not in itself significant.

When asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement *the 2022 appeals process was fair to my learners*, 8% strongly agreed, 27% agreed, 22% disagreed, and 16% strongly disagreed. The remaining 27% neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 32



$$\chi^2(4) = 11.67, p = 0.02$$

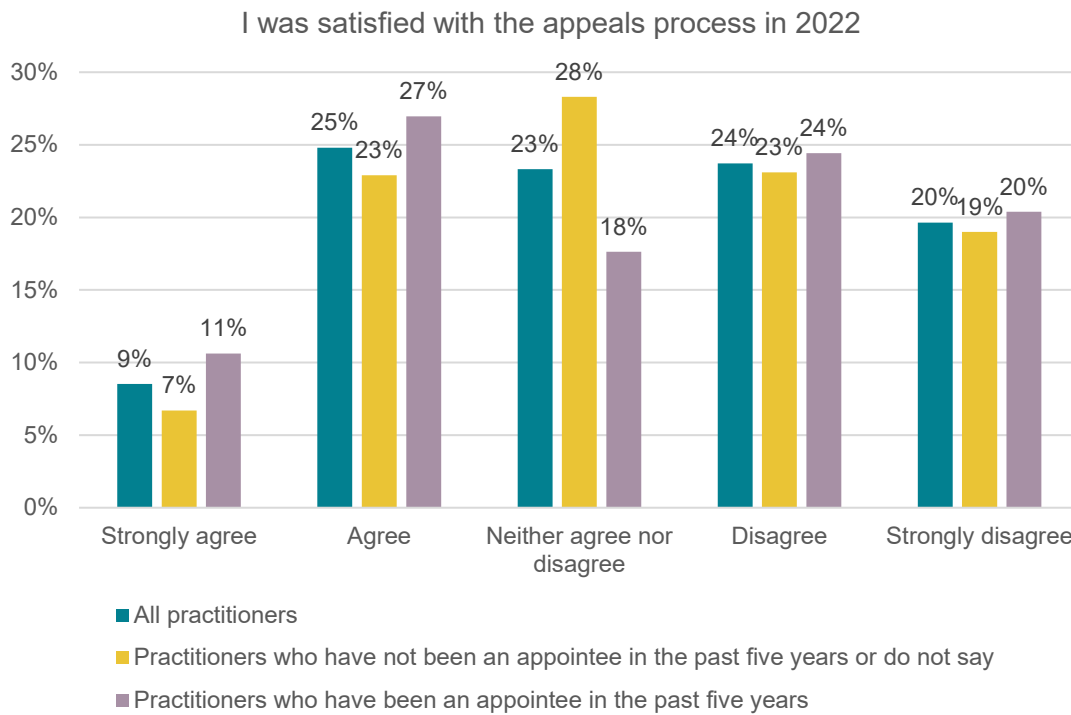
Table 6 Standardised residuals for *The 2022 appeals process was fair to my learners*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.01	-1.03	1.61	0.56	-0.68
Appointees in the past five years	1.08	1.10	-1.72	-0.60	0.73

Inspection of the standardised residuals does not suggest any particular cell or cells are driving this effect. The overall pattern of results suggests that fewer practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years and more practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance are selecting either 'Strongly agree' or 'Agree', although this result is not in itself significant.

When asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement *I was satisfied with the appeals process in 2022*, 9% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 24% disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. The remaining 23% neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 33



$$\chi^2(4) = 18.88, p < 0.001$$

Table 7 Standardised residuals for *I was satisfied with the appeals process in 2022*

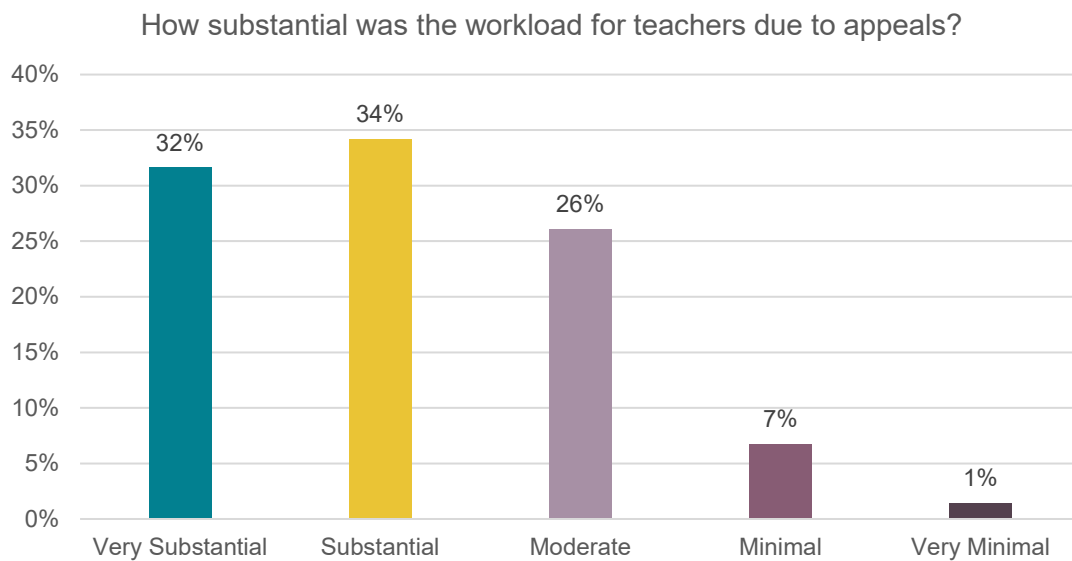
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.45	-0.88	2.40	-0.29	-0.34
Appointees in the past five years	1.55	0.94	-2.56	0.31	0.36

Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests that significance is being driven by more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years and fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Neither agree

nor disagree' than expected by chance. This pattern is reversed for 'Strongly agree' although not individually significantly.

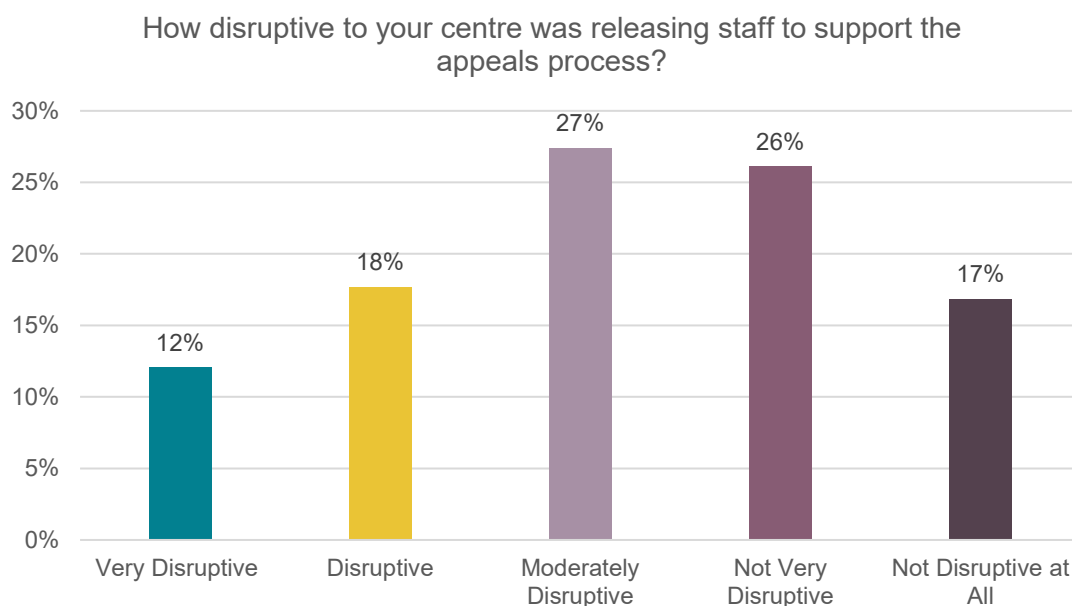
Practitioners' views on the workload due to appeals are shown in Figure 34; 32% of respondents thought the workload due to appeals was very substantial, 34% thought it substantial, 26% thought it moderate, 7% thought it minimal, and 1% thought it was very minimal.

Figure 34



When asked how disruptive to their centre releasing staff to support the appeals process was, 12% of practitioners said very disruptive, 18% said disruptive, 27% said moderately disruptive, 26% said not very disruptive, and 17% said not disruptive at all.

Figure 35

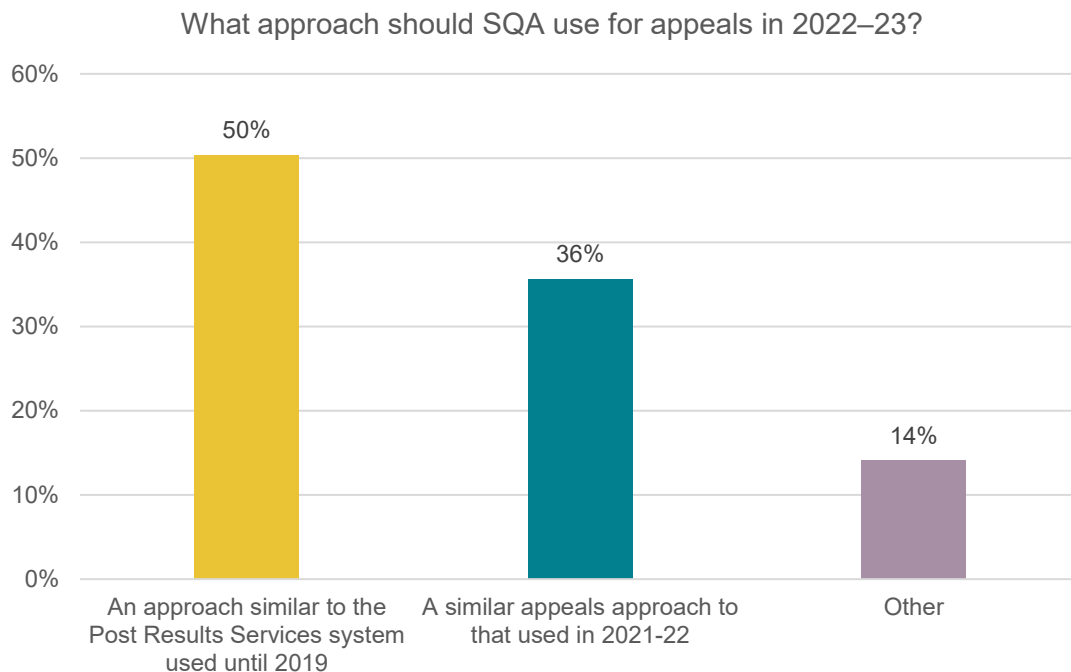


Appeals approach in 2022–23

Practitioners were asked about the approach to appeals SQA should use in 2022–23. The Post Results Service, in place pre-pandemic, offered a clerical check and/or a marking review of the exam script or coursework where a centre had concerns about a learner's certificated grade. The approach in place in 2021–22 was different in that, where a learner's certificated grade was lower than their estimated grade, appeals could come from the centre or directly from the learner; and it was based on a clerical check of the exam script or coursework and a review of alternative evidence submitted as support.

A total of 961 responses were received. Half of the respondents chose an approach similar to the Post Results Services (PRS) system used until 2019 and 36% chose a similar appeals process to that used in 2021–22.

Figure 36



Meanwhile, 14% suggested that SQA should use another approach in 2022–23. The comments on what this new approach should be are discussed in parallel with respondents' reasons below.

Rationale for preferred option

Practitioners were asked for the reasons for their preference for the appeals system that SQA should use in 2022–23; 590 respondents submitted comments. The proportion of respondents who commented mirrors the proportions who chose the different options; that is, 47% of those who commented had opted for an appeals approach similar to PRS, 34% an approach similar to 2021–22, and 19% another approach.

In summary, there was a wide range of views from practitioners covering a range of topics; these views were often contrasting.

Those who prefer a PRS-type approach in 2022–23 do so because:

- ◆ The 2021–22 process placed a substantial workload burden on practitioners.
- ◆ There were perceived issues with the 2021–22 approach in terms of a lack of clarity around evidence requirements, inconsistencies in application of the process, and a lack of feedback and transparency.
- ◆ The 2021–22 system disincentivised learners.
- ◆ COVID disruption has lessened greatly so systems should return to normal.
- ◆ The 2021–22 approach encouraged speculative appeals.
- ◆ A PRS approach is well understood and works well.
- ◆ A PRS approach better supports the maintenance of a national standard.

Those who prefer an approach similar to that used in 2021–22 do so because:

- ◆ Alternative evidence provides a better reflection of learner attainment.
- ◆ The approach appreciates practitioner professional judgement.
- ◆ Learners deserve a safety net.
- ◆ It is a fairer system.
- ◆ Learners continue to be affected by the effects of the pandemic.

Those who would prefer a different system prioritised:

- ◆ an appeals system with clear evidence requirements
- ◆ a transparent system that provides feedback, particularly on unsuccessful appeals
- ◆ a system that is consistent across judgement and across subjects
- ◆ a hybrid system that incorporates re-marks and alternative evidence
- ◆ a return to pre-PRS processes
- ◆ a system with no — or fewer — appeals

An approach similar to PRS

A total of 275 respondents who prefer a PRS-type approach for 2022–23 commented here. The reasons for practitioners opting for an appeals approach similar to PRS can be split, broadly, into two categories: those that value the positives in such a system and, conversely, those that are a reaction to the perceived issues with the 2021–22 system. The latter category attracted substantial numbers of respondents.

By far the most common reason for respondents opting for a PRS-type system in 2022–23 was perceived unsustainability of the workload and administrative burden caused by the 2021–22 approach. Repeatedly, practitioners stated how much extra work the process had generated at an already busy time at the beginning of the school year.

Submitting an appeal for every pupil who did not achieve their predicted grade was a massive workload issue.

The workload created by the appeals was very disruptive and substantial. I would not like to do that again.

Moreover, many respondents viewed this additional workload as time wasted because of the ultimately high number of unsuccessful appeals.

There seems very little point in the hugely increased workload to generate and provide evidence that the SQA would accept when the appeals are unsuccessful... We may as well not have appeals.

This relates to the numerous comments received on perceived issues with the evidence criteria in 2021–22. Many practitioners expressed dismay that what they thought was good evidence, collected across the year, did not result in a successful appeal. A persistent criticism was that SQA had not issued clear guidance on what evidence would be required.

We provided evidence for pupils which demonstrated clear attainment of a particular grade, but their appeal was unsuccessful. I do not understand what the criteria was.

No one quite knows what they are aiming for or how to collect more robust evidence.

There were several comments expressing surprise that only prelims covering the whole course seemed to be acceptable evidence and, given when prelims generally take place, this was not a feasible or acceptable position.

It was stated that partial evidence would be accepted such as end of unit assessments that covered all course areas and skills. However, this was not the case. It is my understanding that in most cases the only accepted evidence was that which replicated the exam. Given that interim assessment take place around the Christmas break, pupils have not undertaken enough course work for this to happen. The alternative is to assess pupils just before exams in order to have acceptable evidence, which absolutely should not be the purpose of assessment.

Perhaps related to the issues around evidence, several respondents opted for a PRS-type system because they believed there were issues around consistency in the 2021–22 model. These respondents stated that there were inconsistencies in appeal judgements and what was deemed acceptable evidence, particularly across different subjects. Although some respondents recognised that they only had anecdotal evidence for this, there was a feeling that it was difficult to justify such an opaque approach.

This leads on to the respondents who argued that the 2021–22 system's lack of feedback affected the transparency of and trust in the process; this has, in some cases, made practitioners question their professional judgement.

We also received no feedback - therefore we have teachers concerned their judgement is not accurate.

With no feedback to centres provided, it is hard to ascertain why the same instruments of assessment and marking instructions resulted in some candidates succeeding in an appeal, while a classmate did not.

A similar number of respondents stated that the 2021–22 approach had been demotivating to learners. It was suggested that learners did not work as hard as they might have, knowing

that they had performed well in their prelim and that they had the fall back of an appeals system. A couple of practitioners thought that learners should not have been made aware of their estimated grade before exams.

A considerable number of respondents believed that the 2021–22 approach led to — or actively encouraged — large numbers of speculative appeals. Some practitioners cited local authorities, senior management, learners, and parents and carers pushing for appeals that they, the practitioners, knew would not be successful. This had further knock-on effects on practitioner workload.

A free for all, with any pupil who had not received their estimate or better applying for an appeal, regardless of teacher advice/quality of evidence. As a teacher, I spent time packaging appeal evidence that I was fairly sure would not generate a better result.

A substantial number of respondents stated that a PRS-type approach was fairer than that used in 2021–22. While some of these comments around fairness related to perceived issues in 2022 (concerns about evidence and consistency, for example), others emphasised the importance of a process where all learners' grades are based on the same evidence. Furthermore, a significant number of respondents specifically cited the maintenance of a national standard as being a reason for the introduction of a PRS system.

This is the only fair way to award grades to a whole nation cohort.

Re-marking papers/work that have been externally assessed is a more robust approach. It is also in line with other exam boards in the UK.

Consistency must be applied without relying on evidence that cannot be genuinely verified.

A substantial number of respondents also said they opted for a PRS-type approach on the basis that it worked effectively (or worked more effectively than the 2021–22 approach) and that practitioners understood its requirements. Comments included that it was consistent, simpler, robust, and less of a workload burden; and that it maintained standards, generated fewer appeals, and avoided a two-chance model.

Finally, for those who preferred a PRS approach, a considerable number of respondents argued that while the 2021–22 appeals system may have been required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, such disruptions have greatly reduced.

Mostly we have had no/very little disruption to learning due to COVID related issues therefore the rigorous nature of teaching and preparation is thorough. There is no need to have a more lenient/forgiving appeals process.

There is now no national formal disruption to learning so appeals should be for exceptional circumstances and not a free for all. Candidates have the opportunity to sit a fair valid assessment that should not be overruled by centres' self-produced assessments.

A similar approach to that used in 2021–22

A total of 202 respondents who opted for a similar approach in 2022–23 to that used in 2021–22 commented. Almost a third of those who commented suggested alternative evidence better reflects candidate attainment. To an extent, such responses reveal not just preferences on an optimal appeals system but on external assessment more generally, with these respondents suggesting dependence on a single high-stakes exam is a less fair reflection of a learner's true ability. Many who commented here believe a second chance or safety net for learners is important.

I've always felt that a full appeals process, using candidate evidence from prelims etc, helps to mitigate the potential inequities of high stakes exams in ways that a re-mark doesn't always do. I realise it's a massive undertaking logistically from the SQA's point of view, and that it's disruptive to schools in terms of appointee release but trying to take an objective candidate-centred view, I think it's the fairer way of ensuring all candidates are equitably awarded.

Substantial numbers of respondents specifically mentioned that they believe that a model that incorporates alternative evidence and takes account of practitioner professional judgement is fairer to learners overall.

It was fair and provided a safety net. One exam does not show the ability of a pupil.

A considerable number of respondents suggested that they thought the 2021–22 process had worked well. This included those who stated that the process was straightforward, clear, and easy to understand and that it had reduced pressure on learners. There were a small number of practitioners who believed the process had reduced their workload.

Now that predicted/estimated/provisional grades are more clearly explained by SQA and adopted by the department/school this is a transparent and straightforward process to adopt. I liked it.

Many respondents suggested that disruption due to the pandemic is still ongoing, and 2022–23's learners deserve a safety net appeals process. There was a strong feeling that while the impact of COVID may not be as acute as in previous years, the 2021–22 cohort have nevertheless had their learning disrupted over the past two years and they continue to suffer in terms of absences and stress, which has affected mental health.

These learners have been affected adversely by the pandemic since 2019–20 session and they, therefore, deserve an appeals process.

These pupils have still had disruption. They deserve a safety net.

A couple of respondents suggested that while there were still modifications to assessment in place, the 2021–22 appeals process should also remain in place.

Finally, from those who opted for an approach similar to that used in 2021–22, it should be noted that almost 30 respondents preferred this approach but caveated that preference with comments on what they thought needed to improve for this year. This included addressing

workload concerns, clarity around evidence requirements, the implementation of feedback and transparency, and consistency in judgements and across subjects.

Another approach

A total of 135 respondents opted for an alternative appeals approach and 113 gave comments on their reasons. Around a fifth of these respondents stated that they did not know what an alternative system should be.

Evidence was the most common theme to emerge from the responses of those who suggested a different appeals system. A considerable number of respondents called for clear guidance on what evidence should be gathered for appeals. For instance, several respondents requested clarity around whether any non-prelim evidence would be accepted. A number suggested that SQA provides appeals materials, including an approved national prelim that is fair and consistent across centres.

SQA should provide appropriate appeals materials for centres to use and provide clear guidance on what is an accepted piece of evidence for appeals.

Conversely, several respondents suggested that SQA needs to trust practitioner judgement and consider a wider range of evidence for appeals, including that from internal assessments.

Give credence to the evidence produced by schools and the opinions of teachers.

A couple of respondents stated that they would like question papers and folios re-marked as well as reviewing alternative evidence as part of any appeals process. This relates to a number of comments supportive of a hybrid appeals system using aspects of both PRS and the 2021–22 approach.

Several respondents also mentioned that feedback on the reasons why appeals are successful or unsuccessful should be available to centres. A number of these practitioners suggested that they would be happy with the 2021–22 approach with the addition of explanation and detail on the outcomes of appeals. A few respondents emphasised the importance of a transparent system. Related to this, a few comments also suggested that fairness in an appeals system is essential, with this explicitly linked on a couple of occasions to evidence requirements and consistency across subjects.

The only other approach suggested by several respondents was that of an appeals system that mirrored the pre-PRS one, including the use of derived grades and concordance.

SQA used to automatically offer the student estimate grade if other results were concordant, this should be done again.

I think you should go back to the appeals system prior to CfE.

Smaller or single numbers of respondents suggested a number of other priorities in an appeals system:

- ◆ a centre-led system where practitioners decide appeals outcomes
- ◆ no direct learner appeals
- ◆ estimated grades not provided before exams as it can be demotivating
- ◆ a whole system less dependent on exams
- ◆ a system depending on the COVID-19 situation later in the year
- ◆ appeals taking learner circumstances into account
- ◆ an appeals system with more experienced markers
- ◆ a pupil-led system without centre involvement
- ◆ an appeals system with no impact on teaching time or practitioner workload
- ◆ an appeals system charging a fee to deter speculative appeals

Finally, several respondents thought that there should not be an appeals process outwith exceptional circumstances requirements. This was framed both in terms of its perceived superfluousness now that COVID-19 disruption has waned, and that it is too burdensome and unwieldy to be of value.

Practitioner interviews

As part of the in-depth interviews, practitioners were asked about their experiences of submitting appeals in 2022. Experiences were sought in terms of the appeals process, comparisons with previous years' appeals process, the advantages and disadvantages of the 2022 appeals process, and important elements to consider in designing future appeals processes.

Views shared by practitioners were wide-ranging and depended largely on the results of their own appeals submissions.

The 2022 appeals process

When asked how they found the 2022 appeals process, a considerable number of participants thought that the process had been straightforward. A number of reasons were mentioned, including clear and comprehensive instructions from SQA and SQA co-ordinators, advanced preparations undertaken by practitioners in anticipation of submitting appeals, good organisation within centres, effective communication between practitioners in centres, and the ease of submitting evidence.

The information for the co-ordinators on what to do to ensure an appeal was submitted correctly through Connect. That was really easy to do as well. That was really comprehensive. I think it was a really good, a really good system.

Yes, straightforward, I didn't have any issues with that. We've got a really good SQA deputy director. She's really on the ball, so she just distributed information. We keep everything pretty organised, and it was just a case of lifting what we had and submitting. So yeah, straightforward.

The guidance was clear, the process was very easy.

I think it's a much more streamlined process. Certainly, it's far easier to submit electronic work.

Conversely, a smaller number of practitioners found the process of submitting appeals challenging. This was generally framed in terms of the time involved in collecting evidence and difficulties with uploading evidence.

It's very onerous because you would have all your marking schemes ready to go, but then you're having to send off the individual marking scheme for every pupil that you're appealing that paper. In terms of workload, it took ages, it was most of my non-contact time for a full week, so it was very onerous in terms of the time involved.

It was a bit of a fuff in terms of like uploading information, scanning papers and things like that.

Similarly, several participants found the overall process confusing. Practitioners mentioned a lack of standardised instructions and lack of clarity when selecting alternative evidence to include in appeals.

Alternative evidence was ultimately confusing. Because it was ... Right, do you use the prelim? Can you use this? Can you not use this? Will it even matter? How much do we put on this? There's not really a standard form for this. Do we use the standard form for this? Do we not? Do we make a standard form?

Further, the confusion surrounding the appeals process was viewed as contributing to the outcome of submitted appeals.

I had a separate assessment that covered the third unit. So, I had full course coverage over two big pupil papers. But because they should have been in one paper for an appeal, that's what we've been hearing, and ours were not. They were ditched. It was absolutely galling that nobody had told us that because I could have done a big mock exam at the end of term to include all three units.

Comparisons to previous years' appeals process

A small number of practitioners provided comparisons between 2022 and previous years' appeals process. The majority of these comments focused on the increase in appeals submission in 2022 as a result of the removal of charges for each appeal and an increase in requests from learners.

If it had been charged, we probably would have only put in one appeal, maybe the one that was definite. And so, I think it probably encouraged schools to appeal more because they won't be charged and then will appeal for a greater number of candidates.

The difference this year is the pupils asked for it. So, we just took the policies as a school. I've got a very good depute who said, 'Well anyone asks we can't say no they've got to get it'.

We had more pupils put in for appeals in 2022 than previously, but I think most schools probably would have done so as well.

On the other hand, a few practitioners felt there was little difference to previous years' appeals process.

I didn't really notice any changes from previous systems. From our perspective, because most of it is portfolio, it wasn't significantly different or more positive or negative in the long run.

I wouldn't say that the appeal process was hugely different last year in comparison to previous years.

Advantages and disadvantages of the 2022 appeals process

Practitioners were asked to share what they believed to be the advantages and disadvantages of the 2022 appeals process. While some practitioners discussed the advantages of the 2022 process, a larger number cited disadvantages.

Those practitioners who discussed the advantages of the 2022 process, generally framed it in terms of the required rigour of the process.

We got lots of our appeals and I have to say, and it made me quite pleased with the rigour that I have in place across internal assessments. I think it's also shown my faculty why all these rules are in place regarding how... we try to make our assessments, our internal assessments, our prelims, whatever, as SQA as possible.

I think the changes have been made to the appeals process seem to be working quite well so far.

By contrast, substantial numbers of participants discussed the perceived disadvantages of the 2022 appeals process. By far the greatest concern related to the additional pressure felt by practitioners to ensure they were, throughout 2022, correctly following guidance, marking assessments appropriately, and providing the evidence required. There was a general feeling that SQA was not aware of the additional workload and responsibility created by the 2022 appeals process.

My worry is the appeals process this time around placed a lot of emphasis again on the teacher and the teachers having to do work in the year running up to it and that makes us feel really responsible ... It just seems like an extra thing to land at their door.

So, I found the personal workload of it horrendous.

It was a lot of work. I have to say. And I was living in fear of the paperwork coming my way in August, because it's just a lot of paperwork, to make sure you guys [SQA] have everything you need.

I mean that was a huge process. So as the department, we've had to go through all of that marking of our own pupils, having that was awful, that was the worst ever. It's only time I've been in tears in my job was knowing I had to mark my own people's work. And that was so hard.

Similarly, a small number of practitioners mentioned the additional stress, for not only themselves but also their learners, of including alternative evidence in the 2022 appeals process.

One of the other things I found was the stress on alternative evidence almost put more stress on during the year to do extra assessment that otherwise you wouldn't do.

It put on extra stress through the year to do extra assessment that maybe they didn't need to do.

Some practitioners raised concerns surrounding communication from, and with, SQA and transparency during the 2022 appeals process. They felt that a lack of clear communication leading up to the appeals process and the absence of feedback were drawbacks of the process in 2022.

There should have been either an exemplar pack that's handed to you or a more regular communication. 'Can I just check these are on track?' There was nothing like that and I think that would really help any centre.

But what was really the worst thing was for all that work and we haven't even done the right thing. But nobody told us that, nobody told us that we needed to include three units.

I think some sort of, very basic feedback on why the appeal was put at that level would have been useful.

I just assumed that the appeals people would have gone back and remarked the prelims. But I'm hearing that maybe didn't happen. I don't know. We're a bit in the dark about how the appeals process worked this year.

Further feedback on the disadvantages of the 2022 appeals process given by a small number of practitioners included the unfairness of the system. This was the experience of practitioners whose appeals were largely unsuccessful in 2022.

I probably put in about 15 appeals and got none of them. And these were children who I had, as I said, one girl had a mark that was like 95% in her prelim and the coursework was 88%, it's ridiculous, they wouldn't upgrade her from a B to an A.

What was galling about the 2022 year was just this whole... We are going to support you. We're going to support the learner. You know, we're going to look at this appeal and support you. And in actual fact it meant nothing.

An appeals process for the future

Practitioners were asked what they believed to be important for SQA to consider when designing an appeals process for the future. A considerable number of respondents believed that including alternative evidence was fair and an important consideration for any future appeals process. The caveat to this was measures to be in place to ensure evidence is robust.

I think if you know your pupil has done significantly worse than expected, then I think it's fair to be able to use alternative evidence, provided it's been done properly and robustly.

But I do think there has to be that accountability of 'is this thing to the standard?', you know? But it would be good to see a range of things being used in appeals. I think that's quite powerful.

However, some practitioners raised concerns about inconsistent marking practices that may exist, believing that their own rigorous and robust processes contrast with other centres' practices.

I am sure there are some centres that will not be as rigorous in that as other ones, so I can understand why that could then lead to a bit of grade inflation. However, I think the SQA does as a whole have to start trusting the practitioners.

I think that the idea of taking other pieces of work, other than the prelims, and using that as a basis for an appeal is very problematic.

I think alternative evidence still has to be timed and controlled, very much so. It still has to demonstrate a level of standard, and sometimes that's the problem. It's very hard to demonstrate that level of standard when it's maybe a class test or maybe things were a bit more flexible and I think that's why sometimes, teachers are creatures of habit, they do revert to the old, tried and tested, you know?

Several practitioners requested greater clarity in future appeals processes, specifically to mitigate perceived issues experienced in the 2022 appeals process.

I think it's about telling us what you want, almost giving us what would be a perfect appeal application. You know what? What do you want to see when you've got an appeal?

I think the important part would be more feedback for schools on what they need to do to try and help the pupils in future years get appeals, because we do, we read the documentation that we get, and we do try and put in what it's asking for.

I know that for example that when you're in a markers' meeting there are things that are said in the markers meeting that never gets out into the world. We, as teachers miss so much of that.

I think there needs to be a bit more open dialogue of what is acceptable and unacceptable evidence.

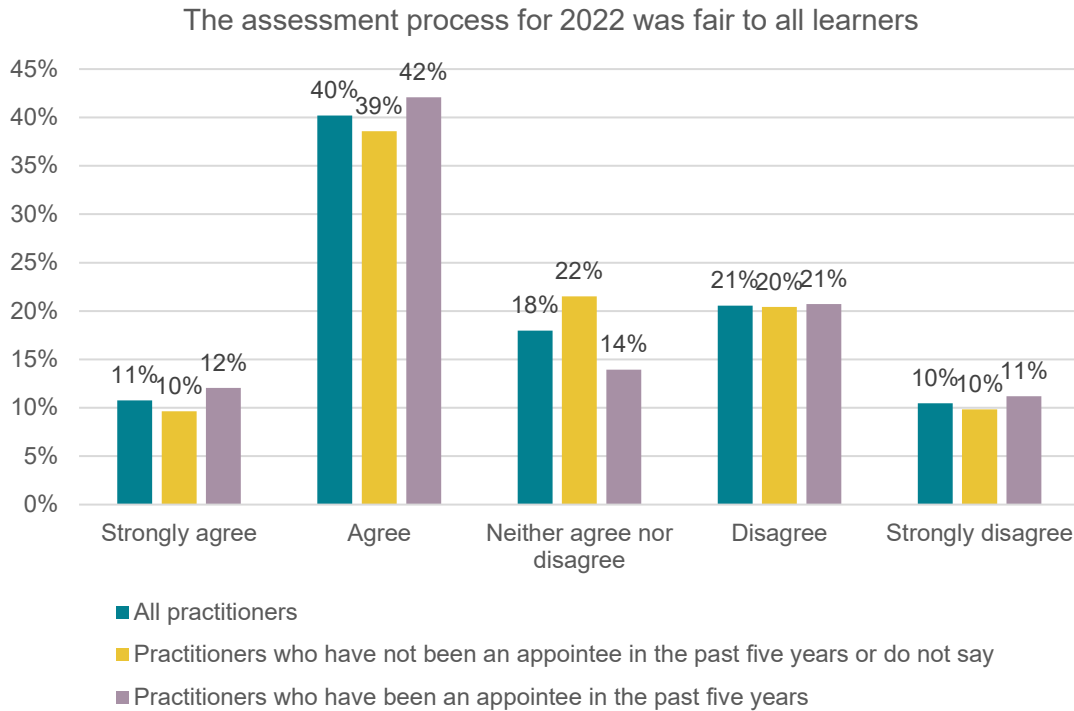
Other individual suggestions on what practitioners believed to be important for a future appeals processes included:

- ◆ offering re-sits as well as appeals
- ◆ learners and parents/carers leading on the appeals process
- ◆ allowing for inferred attainment
- ◆ ensuring appeals are free of charge

8 Overall approach to assessment

More than half (51%) of practitioner respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the assessment process for 2022 was fair to all learners. However, 31% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 18% neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 37



$$\chi^2(4) = 10.59, p = 0.03$$

Table 8 Standardised residuals for *The assessment process for 2022 was fair to all learners*

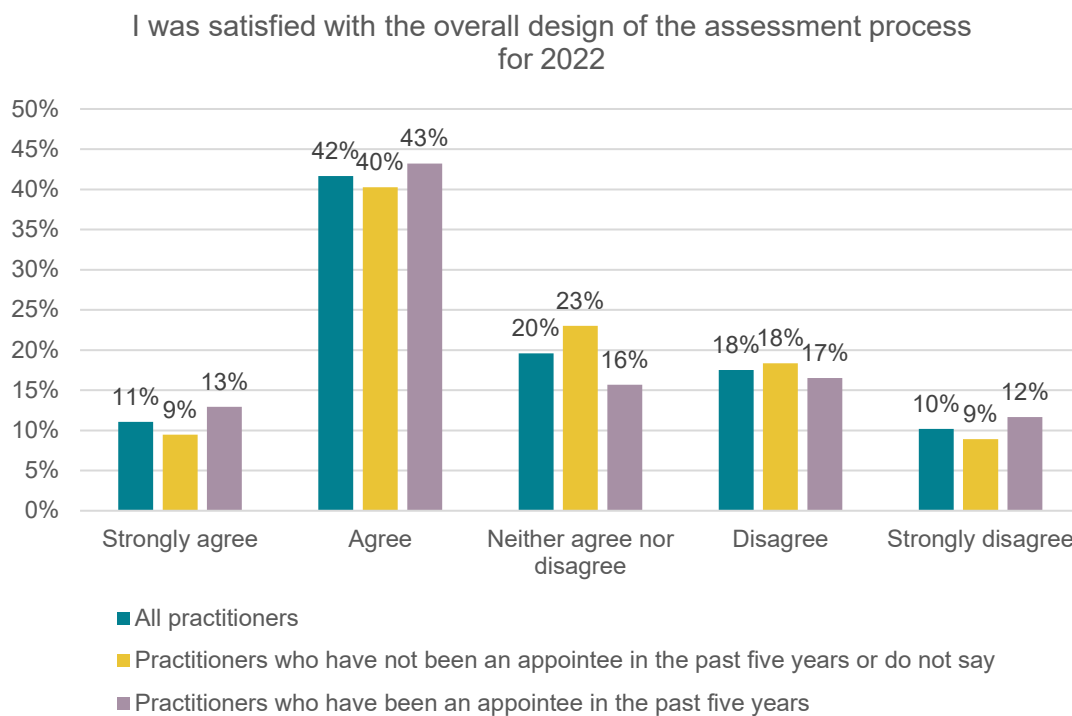
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-0.79	-0.60	1.94	-0.07	-0.46
Appointees in the past five years	0.85	0.64	-2.07	0.08	0.49

Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests significance is being driven by fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years selecting 'Neither agree

nor disagree' than expected by chance. Overall patterns of results suggest more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance are selecting the same option, although this is not in itself significant.

While 53% of practitioners agreed or strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the overall design of the assessment process for 2022, 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed, and a fifth neither agreed nor disagreed. The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not. This is explored further below.

Figure 38



$\chi^2(4) = 12.50, p = 0.01$

Table 9 Standardised residuals for I was satisfied with the overall design of the assessment process for 2022

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.13	-0.50	1.79	0.48	-0.93
Appointees in the past five years	1.20	0.53	-1.92	-0.51	1.00

Inspection of the standardised residuals does not suggest any particular cell or cells are driving this effect, although the overall pattern of results suggest practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years are less likely and practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years more likely than chance to select 'Strongly agree' here, while the reverse is true for 'Neither agree nor disagree'.

Rationale

Those practitioners who were not satisfied with the overall design of the assessment process for 2022 were asked for their reasons; 230 comments were submitted. Most of the reasons were issues that had come up in other areas of the survey.

The two principal areas of reported dissatisfaction were the appeals process in 2022 and the perceived inconsistencies in the 2021–22 process, each cited by around a fifth of the respondents to this question.

Appeals

Many respondents thought there was a lack of clarity around the appeals process and were disappointed at what they believed to be strong evidence not resulting in successful appeals. Some thought the appeals process had not worked as they had been led to believe it would.

Learners and teachers put in an incredible amount of work to gather evidence and we were told by SQA that learners' appeals would be successful if sufficient evidence was submitted. This did not happen. Appropriate evidence was submitted for all learners but only some of the appeals were successful.

A small number compared the appeals process unfavourably with the EECCS.

If a learner missed the exam due to COVID, they benefited against a pupil who missed the second prelim due to COVID.

Moreover, a considerable number of respondents were unhappy that they had not received any feedback on unsuccessful appeals. These respondents were frustrated that they did not have the opportunity to understand what the issues in their centres were — assessment instruments or marking standards, for example. There was concern that centres would not be able to improve their assessment practice without transparent feedback.

Inconsistencies

Many practitioners were not satisfied with the assessment approach in 2022 due to perceived inconsistencies. These inconsistencies were, in the main, thought to be between different subjects in terms of the support offered through modifications and revision support.

Some subjects got far more support than others, reinforcing the notion that some subjects are harder than others when they are supposed to be of equivalent difficulty.

I would've hoped SQA would've adopted a more consistent approach. It was felt that some subjects received much more guidance than others.

In addition, some respondents thought that there were inconsistencies in the appeals process, both between subjects and individual ('arbitrary') decisions.

Modifications

A considerable number of respondents were not satisfied with the 2021–22 process on the basis of modifications. This was for a range of reasons, including those who believed there had not been enough modifications to assessment, those who said that modifications did not actually free up teaching and learning time, those who thought modifications were not consistent across subjects (as mentioned above), and a substantial number who believed that modifications had devalued the course and made progression more difficult.

Simpler exam papers and lowering of grade boundaries is not useful for students and their learning.

Easier standards of paper in N4, 5 and Higher with weak grade boundaries are now leading to pupils in courses which are beyond their capabilities this session, due to their lack of prerequisite knowledge.

Similarly, a number of respondents were dismayed at the removal of assignments. Practitioners argued that this increased the pressure on a high-stakes exam and penalised lower attaining learners.

On the other hand, a larger number of respondents argued that the assessment process for 2022 had not fully taken into account the continuing effects and disruption due to COVID-19. These respondents cited persistent learner and practitioner absences throughout 2021–22, learning loss, and the pandemic's (uneven) effects on learner resilience and mental health.

Didn't take into consideration the profound effect of disruption on the mental health issues of young people and lack of learning routines some faced as they were not in class.

Some pupils have suffered through this. In the main I would suggest it is those at the margins of pass/fail and from backgrounds where the support is not so readily available who will have suffered the most.

Communication and guidance

A significant number of respondents to this question suggested that there were issues around clear communication and guidance. This was particularly true of the appeals process, where there was a perception of a lack of clarity around, for example, evidence requirements, but there were also concerns around delays to publication of information and support materials.

Other issues

Other issues cited by significant numbers of practitioners here included concerns around fairness (generally in terms of the themes above, such as appeals and modifications), subject-specific comments, and the wider assessment system. The latter comments were

generally not specifically about 2022, but about the assessment system more widely, with a number of respondents suggesting a system that relies less on exams.

I am dissatisfied with the assessment process anyway. None of the changes made for 2022 did anything to improve that.

It is not the process in 2022 that I particularly object to but the whole exam process over the past few years.

We need to move away from dated, high stakes end of course exams.

Nonetheless, a couple of practitioners argued that non-exam assessment such as folios benefits those from more advantaged backgrounds.

Issues mentioned by much smaller numbers of respondents were around practitioner workload; general criticism of SQA and the current system; the perceived lack of rigour at National 4, exacerbated by the removal of the Added Value Unit; the estimated grades process; and concerns around the quality of marking.

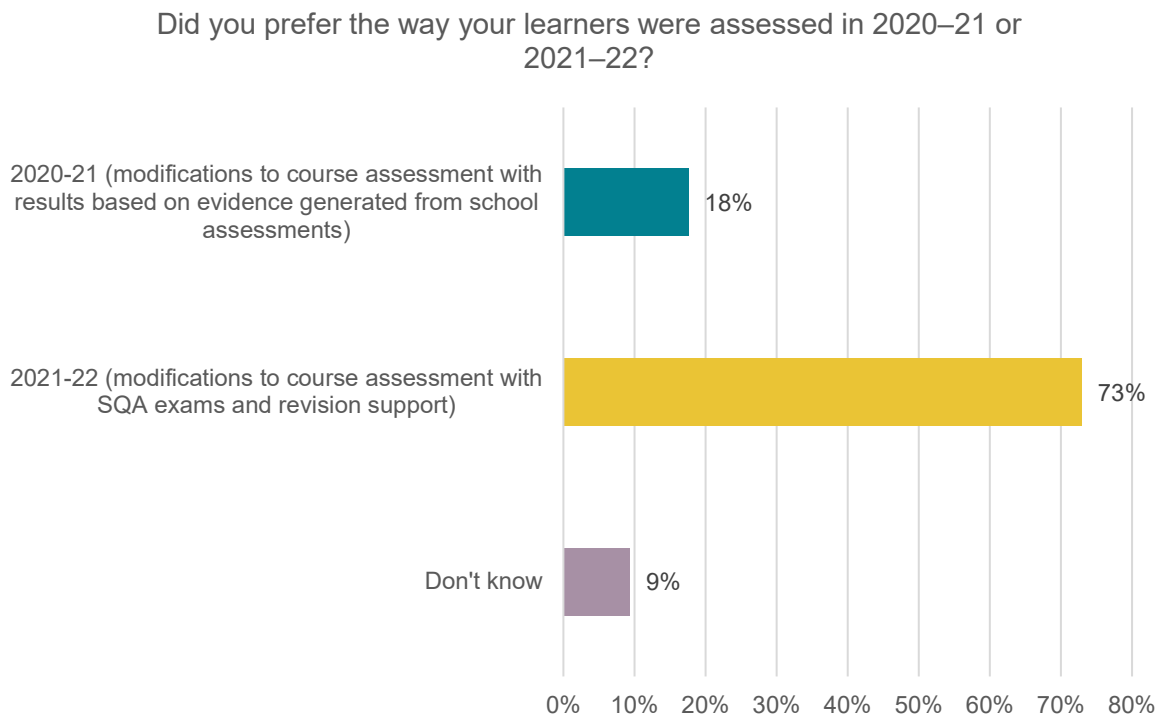
9 Comparison of 2021 and 2022

Practitioner survey respondents were asked if they had taught National Qualifications in both 2020–21 and 2021–22; 95% said that they had. These respondents were then asked a series of questions comparing the approaches across the two years.

Preference

By a wide margin, practitioners reported preferring the way learners were assessed in 2021–22: 73% preferred the 2021–22 approach, compared to 18% who preferred the 2020–21 approach and 9% who did not know.

Figure 39



When asked why they had chosen the approach they did, 730 practitioners left comments. Of these commenters, 16% had chosen the 2020–21 approach, 78% had chosen 2021–22, and 6% had said they did not know.

Preferred 2020–21

Of those who said they preferred the 2020–21 approach to assessment, more than half did so on the basis that it was better or fairer for learners. Particularly in the context of COVID-19 disruption, these practitioners believed that the approach was less stressful for learners, giving them a better opportunity to demonstrate their attainment. These respondents suggested that without the pressure of an external exam, learners' results better reflected their efforts and practitioners could take a holistic rather than narrow view of learner achievement.

It enabled a more holistic judgement to be made of learners.

A fairer reflection of ability.

Related to this, substantial numbers of those who preferred the 2020–21 approach did so because of their antipathy to what they see as the reliance on a single high-stakes exam. A number of these respondents suggested that such exams are rarely used outside a school context and continuous assessment is a preferable approach.

These types of assessment are rarely used in college, university, or work and we should be reflecting on progress over the year rather than a one-off assessment of learning.

The hard work pupils did throughout the year was given the credit it deserved and was not solely based on work they produced under pressure or under examination conditions.

Being able to use evidence gathered across the whole academic year provides a stronger overview of their abilities than what they achieve on one single day under exam conditions.

A considerable number of respondents who preferred the 2020–21 approach suggested that they appreciated the role of and inherent trust in their professional judgement as central to the process. These practitioners stated that they are best placed to decide how and when to assess their learners, and highlighted the autonomy and flexibility built into the 2021 model. Moreover, a number of respondents believed that local quality assurance processes had improved their professional practice.

A small number of practitioners who said that they preferred the 2020–21 approach did so because they had disliked the revision support, modifications, and/or appeals process in 2021–22.

Preferred 2021–22

As noted above, far more practitioners preferred the 2021–22 approach to that used in 2020–21. More than a third of those who submitted comments on why they preferred 2021–22 mentioned the workload and stress associated with the 2020–21 process. However, although workload was a major factor for the disinclination towards 2020–21, this was not the only reason practitioners preferred the 2021–22 approach. Many respondents believe that external assessment, and exams in particular, have value or worth in and of themselves. Most of the themes other than workload that came up were interlinked and related to the importance of a credible, reliable, and impartial assessment for all learners.

On workload, many of these respondents suggested that the substantial volume of additional work in 2020–21 was unsustainable; several said that they would be very reluctant to repeat such an approach and highlighted that this would be an issue if the system were to move towards internal assessment in future. The stress and pressure felt by practitioners in 2020–21 was repeatedly mentioned.

The process in 2020–2021 was more stressful as all marking, moderation and assessments took place in class time. It was disruptive and unpleasant and miserable for everyone involved.

Teacher workload is a serious issue if we moved to school assessments.

Something very substantial would need to change in teacher workload for a system like this to work and be sustainable.

A large proportion of respondents raised issues around internal assessment and the way the 2020–21 approach had operated. Strongly expressed concerns were framed around perceptions of inconsistent standards, grade inflation, a lack of comparability across centres, possible teacher bias, and potential malpractice. Many practitioners said while they were comfortable with the processes in their own centres in 2020–21, they had misgivings about those in others. Others highlighted issues they thought inherent in such an internal assessment approach, such as assessments not being secure and pressure from parents and carers.

Some schools gamed the system.

There was huge disparity in how the assessments took place and how they were marked.

School assessments are not a fair, robust way to assess - pupils across different centres will not have the same experience.

Grade inflation due to unreliable assessment instruments and poor application of marking instructions from teachers not quite proficient and lacking understanding of the National Standards.

Considerable numbers of respondents made reference to the importance of a national standard and welcomed the return to consistent standards, conditions of assessment, and judgements across the country.

All candidates sat the same assessment, and it was marked to the same standard, so the results were fair.

The external exam is a fair assessment standardised across the country.

Standardisation across Scotland through national assessment is essential for public confidence in the qualifications.

Large numbers of practitioners also emphasised what they saw as the importance of exams. A large number of respondents suggested that external assessment, and exams in particular, are important for the integrity and credibility of the qualifications system. There was also a feeling that learners, parents and carers, and other stakeholder groups give more credence to, and are possibly less likely to contest, externally marked assessments.

When the examination process is marked externally it lends more weight to the results.

External exams are essential to keep grades credible.

Independent assessment system is important to the integrity of the qualifications.

An externally created exam that all learners sit on the same day gives a reassurance to all stakeholders that standards are applied equally across the whole country.

A substantial number of respondents specifically highlighted fairness and equity when explaining why they preferred the 2021–22 approach. It was suggested that exams provide a level playing field that is lacking when learners are internally assessed; with exams, all learners have the same conditions of assessment and are judged to the same standard by an impartial and independent body.

Much fairer for everyone to sit the same assessment at the same time and be marked externally, applying consistent standards.

It is important that candidates across Scotland are faced with comparable assessment conditions - level playing field.

Exams are seen in society as a fair way to assess performance, without teacher bias.

I believe externally set assessments are the fairest way to assess pupils across different centres.

Touching on many of the points already noted, several practitioners commented that the 2021–22 approach was more rigorous and robust than that used in 2020–21. This was generally expressed in terms of the importance of consistent external assessment to a national standard. Other practitioners suggested that the experience of sitting exams is essential for learners' development and motivation.

An externally assessed exam is a better way to prepare pupils for their future education journey.

It helped prepare learners for future exams at college and university and also in the workplace.

Exams are required for young people to effectively prepare them for employment, further or higher education.

A small number of practitioners reasoned that they had preferred the 2021–22 approach because they had appreciated the modifications to course assessment or the provision of revision support.

Don't know

Fewer than 50 practitioners who had said they did not know which approach they preferred left reasons as to why. While some suggested that they did not like either approach, a number saw merits and drawbacks across both processes (the same as those noted in the sections above); several suggested that they would like a hybrid model incorporating more coursework and internal assessment but retaining external assessments.

Felt that both approaches have merit, school-based evidence allows pupils to gather and demonstrate their ability in a more naturally occurring way and is a truer reflection of their ability. However, the SQA exams create a level playing field and means that all work is marked to the same standard with the same rigour without any input for teachers of that pupil influencing the marks.

I feel that an exam is beneficial and builds skills for life and work but using course work such as centre based assessments and teacher judgement as part of overall grade would provide a more realistic view of each candidate's ability. A mixture of both systems would therefore be better.

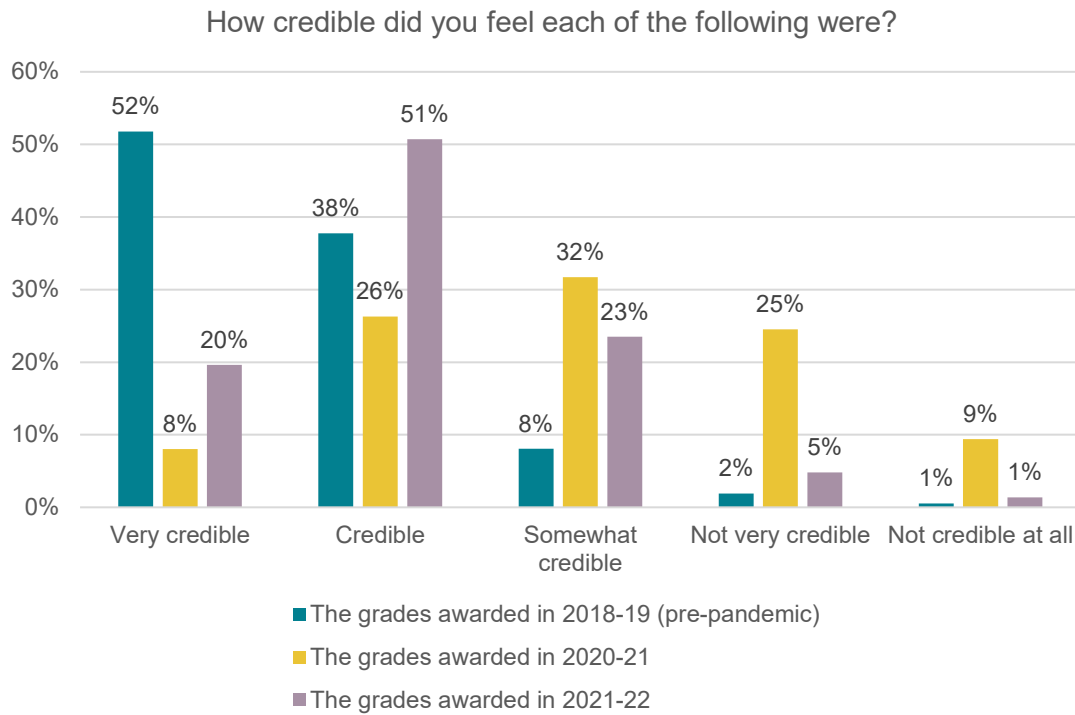
A couple of respondents suggested that they would be happy if National 5 were internally assessed, but exams retained at Higher and Advanced Higher. Another couple mentioned that while they believed 2020–21 had been less stressful for learners, it was more stressful for practitioners.

Credibility

Practitioners were asked how credible they felt the grades awarded were across three years: in 2018–19 (pre-pandemic), in 2020–21, and in 2021–22.

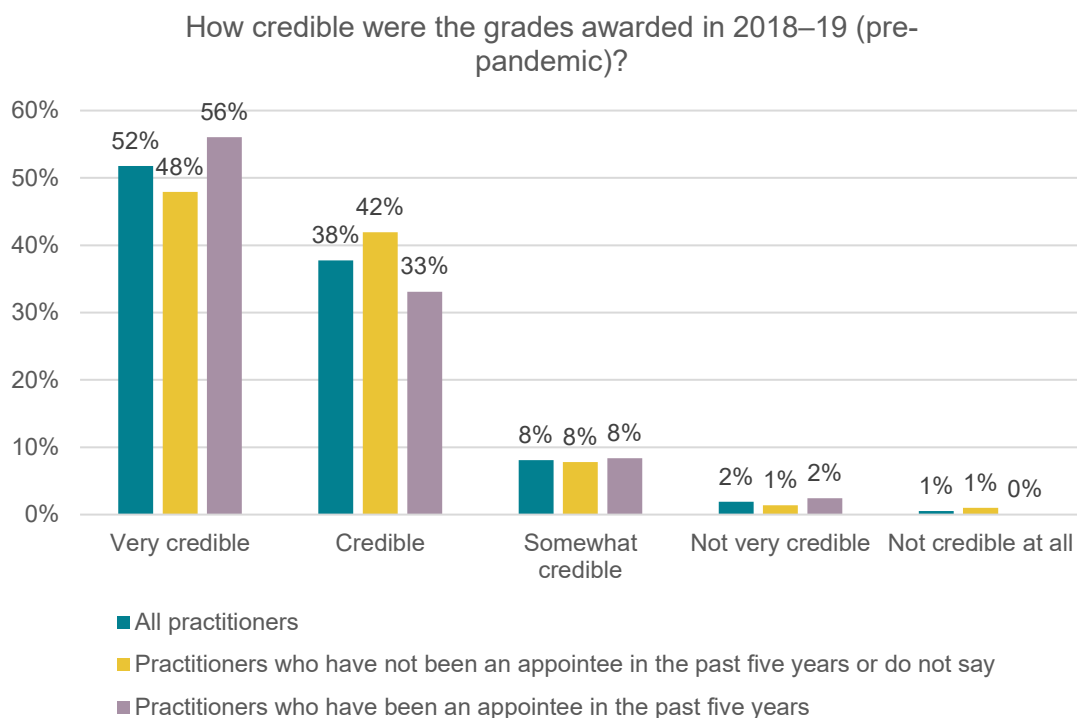
- ◆ 90% of practitioners said that 2018–19 grades were very credible or credible, compared to 34% who said the same about 2020–21 grades and 70% who said the same about 2021–22 grades.
- ◆ Conversely, only 2% of practitioners thought that 2018–19 grades were not very credible or not credible at all, compared with 34% who thought the same about 2020–21 grades and 6% who thought the same about 2021–22 grades.
- ◆ 8% of practitioners thought that 2018–19 grades were somewhat credible, compared to 32% who said the same about 2020–21 grades and 23% who said the same about 2021–22 grades.

Figure 40



The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not on the credibility of the grades awarded pre-pandemic. This is explored further below.

Figure 41



$\chi^2(4) = 13.92, p = 0.01$

Table 10 Standardised residuals for *How credible were the grades awarded in 2018–19 (pre-pandemic)?*

	Very credible	Credible	Somewhat credible	Not very credible	Not credible at all
Non-appointees or do not say	-1.21	1.52	-0.23	-0.80	1.47
Appointees in the past five years	1.27	-1.60	0.24	0.84	-1.54

Inspection of standardised residuals does not reveal any particular cell or cells driving this effect. The overall pattern suggests that more practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years and fewer practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance select the options ‘Very credible’, while the reverse pattern is visible for ‘Credible’ and ‘Not credible at all’.

Those respondents who had stated that they did not think the 2021–22 grades were credible were asked why they thought this. Around 50 practitioners submitted comments. These, broadly, fell into two themes: around half of respondents here believed that 2021–22 grades lacked rigour and, conversely, the other half thought that not enough account had been taken of the effects of COVID-19.

Those who suggested that 2021–22 grades had lacked rigour suggested the modifications to assessment and more generous grading threaten the credibility of National Qualifications. Moreover, a number of respondents suggested that this has resulted in learners progressing in subjects where they possibly should not have.

Pass marks were far too low which bring credibility of the exam into dispute.

Pass marks very low and now we have pupils sitting in classes they are not able to pass.

In contrast, those respondents who suggested that not enough account had been taken of the effects of COVID-19 cited ongoing disruption throughout 2021–22. Accordingly, they believed that 2021–22 grades were not credible because impacts, such as those on mental health, were not fully taken into consideration.

Pupils have not yet recovered from COVID disruption.

Pupils were at a disadvantage but ... exams went ahead 'like normal' meaning the expectations were the same as pre-pandemic but the outcomes were never going to be of that standard.

A number of respondents questioned SQA's grading in 2021–22 when commenting on the credibility of 2021–22 grades. These practitioners thought marking was too stringent, and that teachers' estimated grades were a better reflection of learner attainment.

There was an assumption that teachers had inflated grades in 2020–21 and so grades in 2022 needed to be suppressed. This is not the case.

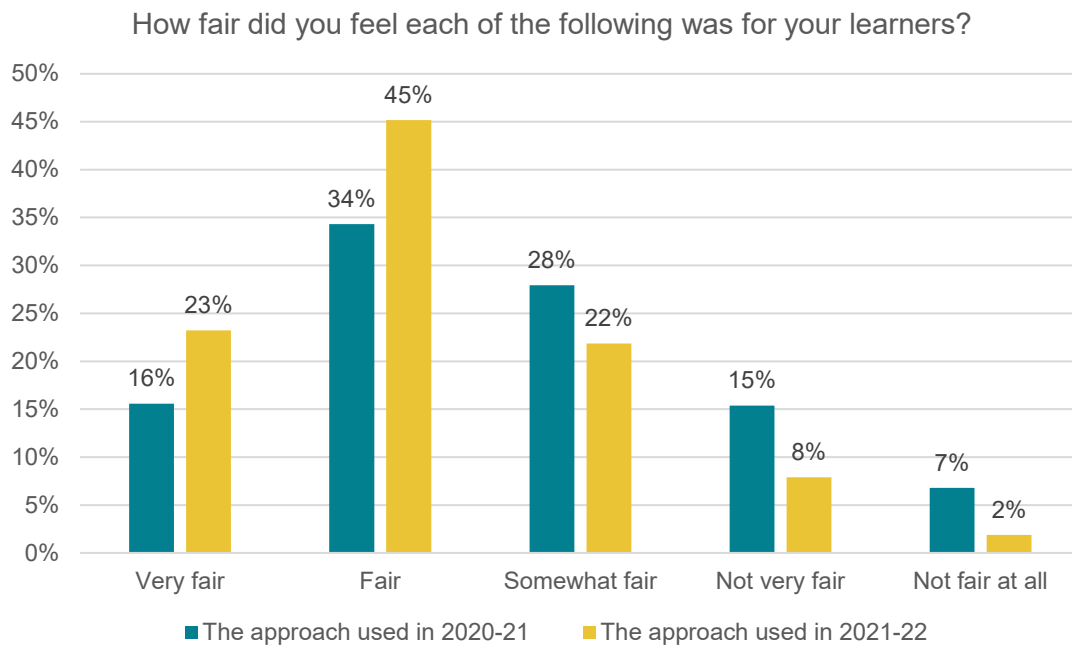
On a related note, a couple of respondents stated that the appeals process showed that SQA's and practitioners' marking were not in alignment. A couple of respondents also stated that the 2021–22 assessment process had demotivated learners by leading them to believe they had a safety net.

Fairness

More than two-thirds (68%) of practitioners suggested that the approach used in 2021–22 was very fair or fair to learners, compared to 50% who said the same about the 2020–21 approach.

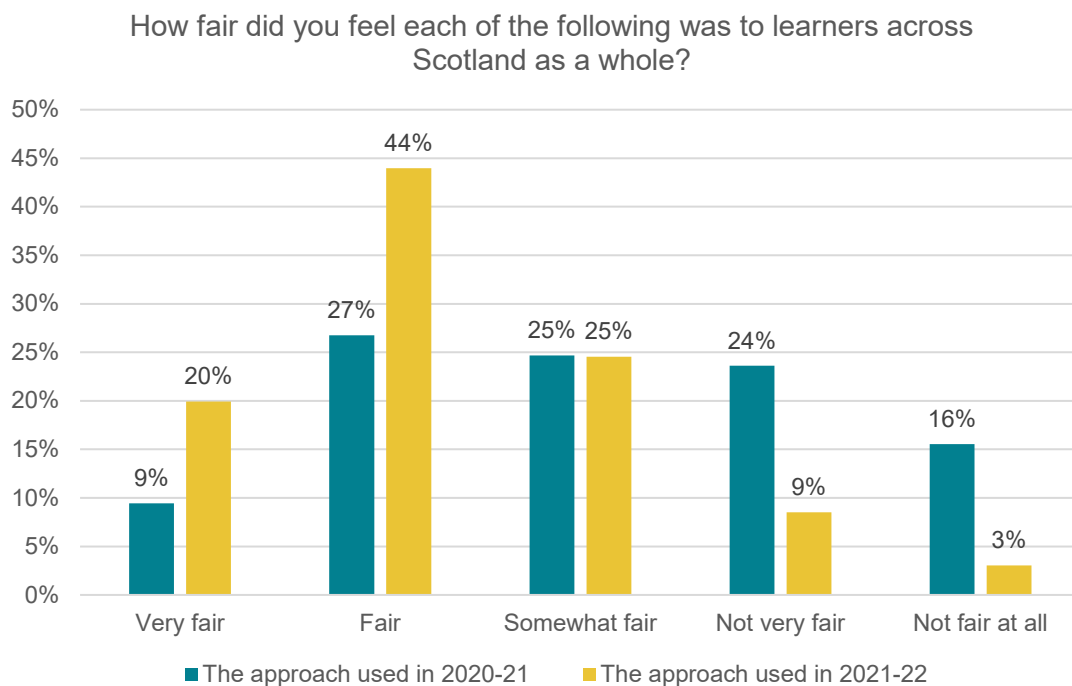
On the other hand, 22% of practitioners thought the 2020–21 approach was not very fair or not fair at all, compared to 10% who thought the same about the 2021–22 approach. Meanwhile, 28% of respondents thought the 2020–21 approach was somewhat fair, compared to 22% who thought the same about the 2021–22 approach.

Figure 42



Practitioners were asked for their views on fairness to learners across Scotland, rather than just their own learners. While 64% of respondents thought that the 2021–22 approach was very fair or fair to learners across Scotland as a whole, 36% thought the same about the 2020–21 approach. While 39% of practitioners said that the 2020–21 was not very fair or not fair at all, only 12% thought the same about the 2021–22 approach. A quarter of respondents thought that the 2020–21 approach was somewhat fair, and the same proportion reported thinking the 2021–22 approach was somewhat fair.

Figure 43

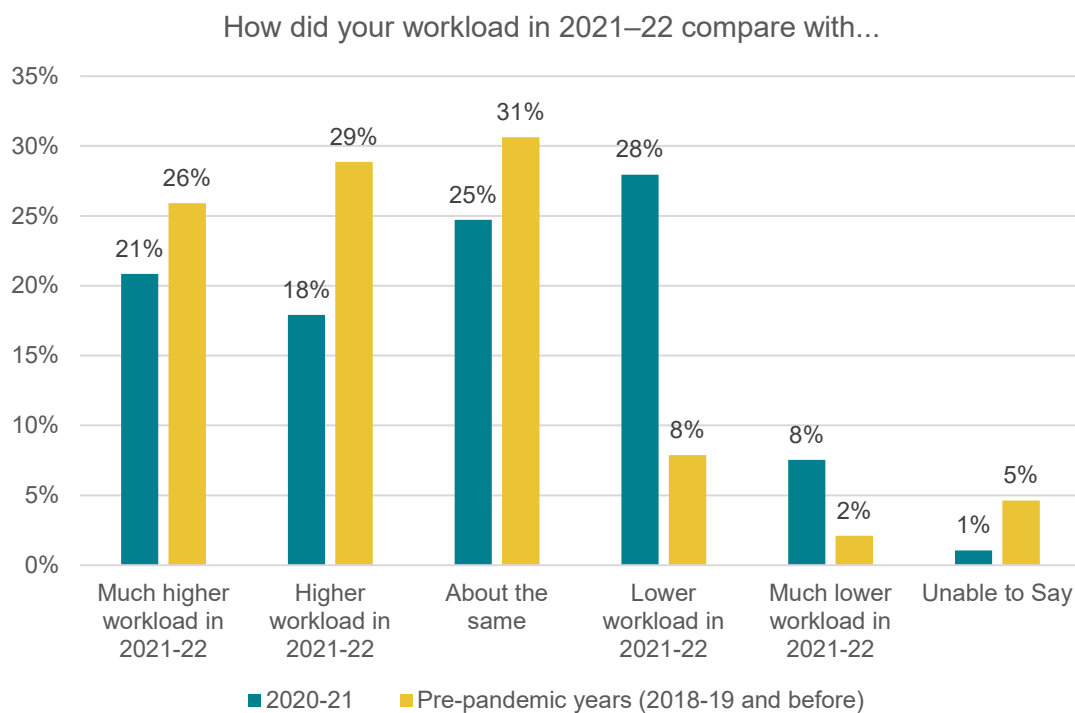


Workload

When asked about their workload in 2021–22:

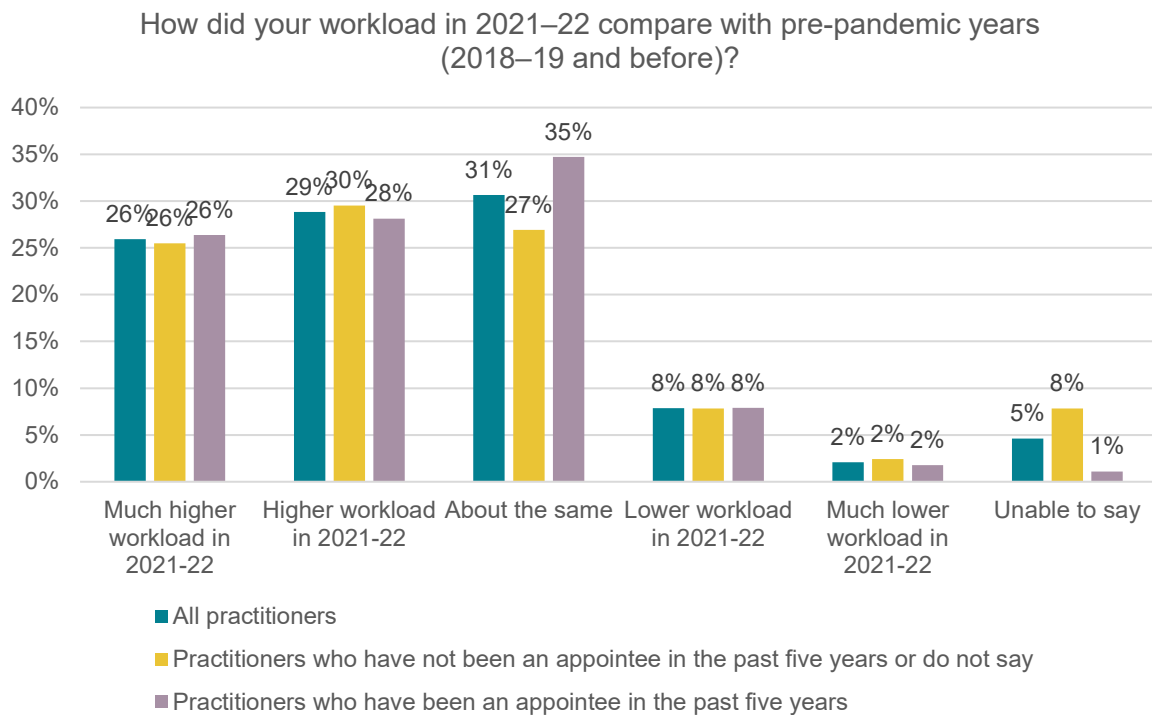
- ◆ 39% of practitioners said it was higher or much higher than in 2020–21 and 55% said it was higher or much higher than in pre-pandemic years
- ◆ On the other hand, 36% of practitioners said that their 2021–22 workload was lower or much lower than in 2020–21 and 10% said it was lower or much lower than in pre-pandemic years
- ◆ A quarter of respondents said that their workload in 2021–22 was about the same as in 2020–21 and 31% said that it was about the same as in pre-pandemic years.

Figure 44



The chi-squared test revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the views of practitioners who have been an appointee in the past five years and those who have not on how workload in 2021–22 compared with pre-pandemic years. This is explored further below.

Figure 45



$\chi^2(5) = 28.80, p < 0.001$

Table 11 Standardised residuals for *How did your workload in 2021–22 compare with pre-pandemic years (2018–19 and before)?*

	Much higher workload in 2021–22	Higher workload in 2021–22	About the same	Lower workload in 2021–22	Much lower workload in 2021–22	Unable to say
Non-appointees or do not say	-0.72	-0.30	-2.05	-0.33	0.32	3.03
Appointees in the past five years	-0.33	-0.82	0.98	-0.25	-0.64	-3.63

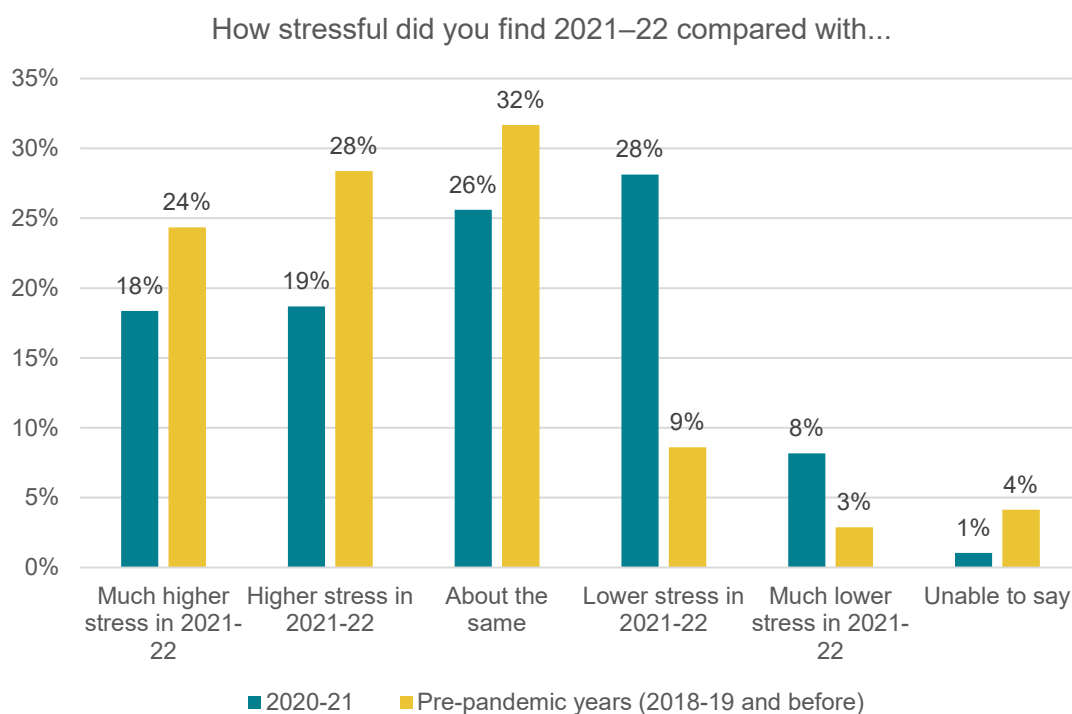
Inspection of the standardised residuals suggests significance is being driven by fewer practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years than expected by chance selecting ‘About the same’. Additionally, more practitioners who have not worked as appointees in the past five years and fewer practitioners who have worked as appointees in the past five years than chance would predict are selecting ‘Unable to say’.

Stress

When asked about how stressful they had found 2021–22 compared to previous years:

- ◆ 37% of respondents said they had much higher stress or higher stress in 2021–22 than in 2020–21 and 53% said they had much higher stress or higher stress in 2021–22 than in pre-pandemic years.
- ◆ 26% of practitioners reported stress being about the same in 2021–22 and 2020–21 and 32% reported stress being about the same in 2021–22 and pre-pandemic years.
- ◆ 36% of respondents said they had much lower stress or lower stress in 2021–22 than in 2020–21 and 12% said they had much lower stress or lower stress in 2021–22 than in pre-pandemic years.

Figure 46



Practitioner interviews

As part of the in-depth interviews, practitioners were asked to compare their experiences of and thoughts about the different assessment approaches used in 2021 and 2022. This was in terms of the different approaches' relative advantages and disadvantages and their impact on fairness, rigour, and learner stress.

Practitioners shared a wide range of views, with many citing benefits and drawbacks of both the 2021 and 2022 approaches. However, as with the survey responses, on balance, practitioners clearly preferred the return to a more normal assessment approach in 2022, with learner exam stress being the only notable disadvantage mentioned by several participants.

Learner stress

A considerable number of participants thought that the 2021 alternative certification model (ACM) had been less stressful for learners than the 2022 experience. This was for a number of reasons, including the absence of a one-off high-stakes exam, the familiarity of taking assessments in classrooms instead of exam halls, the support that could be offered by practitioners, and assessments being split into smaller chunks.

In terms of how the children would have experienced that, I'm sure they would say that it was easier for them, less stressful, less challenging for them.

On the other hand, several participants suggested that the alternative certification model had nonetheless been stressful for learners. While it is difficult to separate out the stress of, for example, COVID-19 disruption and remote learning from the assessment approach itself, it was suggested that the 2021 experience, including lockdowns, disruption to teaching and learning, uncertainty, and over-assessment, adversely affected learner mental health. A number of practitioners suggested that the experience has had a lasting effect on learner resilience.

It was assessment after assessment after assessment because we seemed to be in a panic of we need to generate as much evidence as we possibly can.

Conversely, a repeated theme from participants was how stressful the return to exams in 2022 had been for learners. This was generally framed in terms of how much anxiety formal, externally assessed exams create in learners, but several practitioners suggested that this was more difficult in 2022 because learners had never experienced an exam diet before.

Going back to that very traditional exam approach and some of them... I think some of them weren't quite as ready for it as I would have liked.

There was nobody sitting in exam in the exam hall last year who done it before.

Similarly, a number of participants suggested that both approaches had been stressful for learners, but in distinct ways, due to the different circumstances. Exams are stressful for learners, but this is a short-term known stress, whereas the overall experience in 2021 had taken its toll on learner mental health.

Fairness

In the interviews, discussions of fairness of the 2021 and 2022 assessment approaches ranged from that for individual learners to the fairness of a national standard. These different — and possibly at times contrasting — notions of fairness impacted on participant views.

Those who believed that the 2021 approach had been fairer to learners generally did so because it was perceived to be a more supportive model, offering learners the best opportunity to achieve. Practitioners being able to be flexible in tailoring their assessments was thought to have increased fairness, particularly for lower attaining learners or those most affected by the pandemic.

When we looked at the analysis of our... looked after or care experienced young people... their outcomes were much more successful in the alternative certification model, I would say. That wasn't necessarily because of a lack of challenge. I would say it was because it increased equity because there was a different level of support being given in that model.

By contrast, substantial numbers of participants thought that the 2022 approach was fairer. Overwhelming, this was framed in terms of all learners nationally taking the same assessments, at the same time, marked to the same standard.

The fairest approach is the formal exam approach, where every learner is sitting the same assessment at the same time and then you've got that standard.

I think fairness across the country for learners, it is the exam base.

However, a couple of participants did acknowledge the tensions in ensuring fairness for individual learners and fairness across the whole cohort of learners.

Everyone's marked to the same standard, everything's standardised, everyone sits it, everybody gets the same time ...so of course that's fairer, but perhaps not fairer for the learner to get the best out of them.

Standards

Related perhaps to discussions on fairness, a recurring theme from participants was that of the perception of inconsistent standards inherent in the 2021 approach. While some practitioners highlighted that they appreciated the flexibility of the ACM and the use it made of their professional judgement, the issue that was raised most often in comparing the 2021 and 2022 approaches was that of comparability of processes and, therefore, grades in the 2021 model.

While some practitioners raised general concerns about inconsistent assessment, marking, or quality assurance practices and what that meant in terms a national standard, others believed that their own rigorous and robust processes in 2021 contrasted with other centres' practices. A few participants specifically mentioned pressure brought to bear by senior management or parents and carers.

I'm conscious that not all schools are as rigorous and not all schools do things the same way.

The judgements throughout the country, were they accurate?

2021 just wasn't fair. There was nothing fair in that. You knew, you knew across Scotland there was cheating.

I think there will have been places where parental pressure will have wavered in and given advantages, perhaps.

A number of participants recognised that in 2021 they had struggled to remain objective and found their combined role of teacher and assessor challenging and at times emotionally taxing. Therefore, they welcomed the return to an impartial process in 2022.

You don't risk the subjectiveness seeping into the grading.

Rigour

None of the interview participants believed the 2021 approach to be a more rigorous assessment of learner skills and knowledge than the 2022 approach. However, several did suggest that both years were equally as rigorous, if, by definition, different. These participants often highlighted what they saw as particularly robust processes in their own centres.

I have to say I don't think 2021 was any less rigorous. It was just different. It was just different. It was a different way of assessing.

I think both of them effectively assessed skills and knowledge.

Nevertheless, more practitioners thought that the 2022 approach was a rigorous and effective assessment than the 2021 approach. This was for a number of reasons, including that teaching and learning was less disrupted, that all learners undertook the same assessments subject to the same quality assurance procedures, and the exams are in general a more robust test of learner skills and knowledge.

Assessment method

Considerable numbers of interview participants welcomed the return to exams in 2022. While some thought the advantages of exams were those already outlined above, such as the maintenance of a national standard and rigour, others explicitly stated that they believe the exam experience to be a benefit to learners and one which, it was suggested, learners themselves appreciate.

Do you know it was nice to see them get a chance to properly sit an exam and to go into an exam hall.

The exams are important. They are a rite of passage and I think they are important for the kids to get to this final point.

The closure of an exam is good, it gives the students validation ... it gave them a chance to prove that they had accomplished what it was that they accomplished.

Related to this, several practitioners appreciated the certainty and return to normality in 2022, allowing settled and familiar processes and planning.

On the other hand, a number of practitioners suggested that there were advantages of using a wider frame of evidence in the 2021 ACM, with grades based on a number of different assessments, including coursework. Some participants thought taking into account a wider range of evidence better demonstrated learner attainment. There were suggestions that any

assessment model in future should incorporate more continuous assessment and rely less on high-stakes exams.

Nonetheless, some participants described struggling to collect valid assessment evidence in 2021, particularly, perhaps, college practitioners because colleges locked down for longer than schools.

Practitioner workload and stress

A repeated and persistent theme to emerge when participants were asked to think about their experiences in 2021 compared to 2022 was that of practitioner workload and stress. Many practitioners mentioned how much extra work the ACM marking and quality assurance processes had entailed. Moreover, many felt stressed as a result of that workload and perceived pressure from senior management and parents and carers. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, a number of participants found the process of summatively assessing their own learners extremely stressful.

That was possibly the most stressful experience of my 20-year teaching career.

I would never want to go back to the workload when we did it ourselves.

I hated the responsibility of marking my own children.

On a couple of occasions, participants suggested that the 2021 approach had been less stressful for learners, while the 2022 approach had been less stressful for practitioners.

Other

The only other themes to emerge from several participants were that the appeals process and modifications were an advantage of the 2022 approach and that the use of professional judgement and the collegiate approach to the quality assurance process in 2021 were beneficial.