

2021 National Qualifications Appeal Outcomes

On 7 December 2021, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) published the outcomes of 2021 Appeals for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses.

- [Appeals Report Tables 2021 – Academic Judgement](#)
- [Appeals Report Tables 2021 – Unresolved Administrative Error, and Discrimination](#)
- [Appeals Report Summary 2021](#)

This report reflects my observations, as Chief Examining Officer for Scotland, on the appeals process we designed and processed for 2021, a very challenging year for everyone living in Scotland and especially for learners.

Context

All partners involved in the National Qualifications 2021 Group agreed that at the heart of the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) was demonstrated attainment — evidence of learning and skills. Based on that evidence, teachers and lecturers exercised their professional judgement to determine provisional results for learners.

Having evidence of a learner's skills and knowledge so that they can be awarded a qualification is important and is the cornerstone of our qualifications system's credibility. We know that colleges, universities and employers want to see that. It is also important for learners to have confidence in their qualifications, now and over time.

Teachers and lecturers, with the support of the system and SQA, worked hard to deliver the right results to learners, first time. However, it was important that a direct right of appeal was available for learners to ensure that their demonstrated ability was appropriately graded, and that the processes in place to ensure that, were appropriately followed.

Appeal process

To help design the appeals process for 2020-21, which would reflect the rights contained in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), SQA undertook a national consultation, seeking the views of the Scottish education system, including learners, parents, carers, and their representatives.

This led to learners being able to appeal directly to SQA for free, for the first time. Learners were able to request an appeal after they had received their provisional results from their school, college or training provider, on Friday 25 June.

Appeal requests were processed with the support of schools, colleges and training providers after learners received their results in August.

The appeal process allowed for three grounds:

- 'Academic Judgement' - where a learner disagreed with their school, college or training provider's quality assured academic judgement in its assessment of the learner's evidence
- 'Unresolved Administrative Error' - where a learner believed that there was an error in either:
 - transferring the provisional result from their school, college or training provider to SQA, or
 - SQA processing the result
- 'Discrimination' – could be requested in two circumstances:
 - there had been a breach of the Equality Act 2010 (which must have been either acknowledged by their school, college or training provider or established by a court or the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman), or
 - their school, college or training provider failed to provide agreed Assessment Arrangements

As in any year, priority was given to learners who needed to confirm a university or college place.

A key principle of the awarding of qualifications in any year is that a learner's grade is based on the evidence of their demonstrated attainment of the skills and knowledge of a course, and this is a central feature of this year's alternative certification model. Given this, an appeal of a result must also be based on the evidence of the learner's demonstrated attainment against the national standard. Therefore, the outcomes of an evidence-based appeal could be that a learner's grade could go up, go down, or stay the same.

For each appeal request, schools, colleges and training providers had to provide all the evidence they used to determine the learner's provisional result. The provisional result should have been based on a holistic judgement of the learner's demonstrated attainment across all the key evidence gathered, as outlined in the requirements of the subject-specific guidance.

As there were no standardised assessments in 2021, the appeals process required a different approach. Any evidence supplied in support of an appeal request was considered closely by SQA appointees – practising teachers and lecturers – who reviewed materials against the broad assessment requirements of the course.

The starting point for the review was that schools, colleges, and training providers judgements were fair and within acceptable tolerances – only if the appointee discerned a significant and material difference was a change in grade recommended.

Appeal outcomes

The overall outcomes of accepted 2021 appeals are summarised below. Further information can be found on our [Statistics Information webpage](#).

Table 1: 2021 Appeal outcomes – ‘Academic Judgement’

Award level	Total Appeals Received	Grade Amended Up	Grade Amended Down	No Grade Change
National 5	974	9	5	960
Higher	2,115	21	8	2,086
Advanced Higher	176	2	0	174

Table 2: 2021 Appeal outcomes – ‘Unresolved Administrative Error’

Award level	Total Appeals Received	Total Upheld*	Grade Amended Up	Grade Amended Down	No Grade Change
National 5	10	0	0	0	0
Higher	19	0	0	0	0
Advanced Higher	1	0	0	0	0

*Upheld Appeals were approved for the category under which they were submitted.

Table 3: 2021 Appeal outcomes – ‘Discrimination’

Award level	Total Appeals Received	Total Upheld*	Grade Amended Up	Grade Amended Down	No Grade Change	In progress
National 5	65	9	3	0	2	4
Higher	118	22	9	0	2	11
Advanced Higher	5	0	0	0	0	0

*Upheld Appeals were approved for the category under which they were submitted.

Final remarks

This has been another very challenging year for everyone involved in Scottish education. I am very grateful, as Scotland's Chief Examining Officer, to all the SQA Appointees - practising teachers and lecturers, SQA staff, SQA co-ordinators, school and college support staff, local authorities, professional associations and national organisations who have supported the design and delivery of the appeals service this year.

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Scotland's Chief Examining Officer

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