

# Responses to Scottish Qualifications Authority public consultation on SQA statistics

## Background to the consultation

On the 9 March 2020, Scottish Qualifications Authority opened a public consultation on the use of their statistics, with the purpose to engage with users on our statistics and information. With the following brief:

“As part of phasing in compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, SQA would like to understand how our statistics and information are being used and whether we are currently meeting user needs within our remit as a statistics team at a national awarding body”.

This survey sought user views on our publications and responses were used to inform decision making. The survey ran for three months and closed on 29 May 2020.

As well as directly contacting likely stakeholders via email, the survey was advertised widely via Scot Stat.

## Responses

Twenty-five valid responses were received, where at least one question about SQA’s publications was answered. Not every respondent answered every question. This relatively low number of responses should be borne in mind and the results should not be taken as fully indicative of the totality of our users.

The responses showed that our statistics were mostly being used in a professional capacity. The most common area of work for respondents were Education Authorities (11 out of 25), with the rest of respondents belonging to a public body, 3<sup>rd</sup> sector body, or research/academic body. Most respondents described themselves as a statistician, or in an analytical role (16 out of 25), while the rest were from a wide range of professions.

Responses reveal that our statistics are used professionally for a wide range of uses, with “Research / Analysis” (20) the most common, and around half of respondents also used statistics for “Monitoring performance” (14), “General issue / trends” (13) and “Used to create my own datasets” (11).

## Statistics used

SQA publishes multiple statistical publications throughout the year, from our headline Attainment statistics August to the Annual Statistical Review. We asked respondents to let us which our publications they use or access (multiple answers were possible).

The most frequently used statistic publication was the August Attainment which nearly all respondents reported as being used by them. All publications had multiple users, and respondents were typically interested in multiple publications.

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
Attainment Statistics (August)	21
Attainment Statistics (December)	17

Attainment Statistics (Male / Female)	15
Attainment Statistics (Schools / college)	13
Attainment Statistics (Education Authority)	14
Results services	6
Progression tables	8
Annual Statistical Report	14

In our publications, multiple levels of detail are often available. We are almost always able to provide data at a national level (ie. totals for all of Scotland), but we are also often able to provide breakdowns at the regional level, the Education Authorities, and the type of Centre (eg. Secondary school, College, Independent school etc.). We asked respondents which of these levels they were most interested in (multiple answers were possible)

Almost every respondent was interested in data at the national level (ie. Scotland). Lower levels of detail also had very high interest, with over half of respondents reporting interested at regional, Educational Authority, and Centre type level.

<b>Level of data</b>	<b>Number of respondents</b>
UK level	7
National level (ie. Scotland)	23
Regional level	16
EA level	18
Centre type level	13

## **Satisfaction and Timing**

We asked respondents how satisfied they were overall with our publications (statistical and information) and their timing. There was a high level of reported satisfaction with SQA's statistical publications. Of 18 responses on the subject, 15 reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied", with all others being "neutral". For information publications, 11 out of 13 responses reported being "satisfied" or "very satisfied", with two respondents being "neutral".

Comments on the quality and timing of the publication were very positive, with one comment suggesting some National Qualification breakdowns could be published earlier.

## **Suitability and areas for improvement**

We asked respondents how well our statistical publications were currently meeting their requirements. Out of 18 respondents who responded, 11 reported that the statistics that they used met their requirements. We then asked respondents to comment further about how our publication were not meeting their requirements. Comments highlighted inconsistencies in course titles and awkward spreadsheet formats inhibiting data entry. Further requests for "machine readable" formats were made which would facilitate further analysis and merging with other sources.

Most other comments requested details that are not currently provided, such as Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation breakdowns, and aggregations regarding the number of grades achieved per student.

Further comments related to improving statistical publications fell into two broad categories – either wanting additional graphs, infographics and other visualisations, which would aid interpretation by an end user.

In the consultation, it was indicated that future Official Statistics publication from SQA will add further narrative to the statistics to add context to results. We asked which visualisations would be beneficial for user understanding. The responses shown below indicate a broad support for further visualisations although there was no strong consensus on which methods would be best.

**Which would be most useful in further aiding user understanding?**

Charts	3
Dashboard	3
Geographical maps (where appropriate)	2
I do not require further visual aids	3
Infographics	5

## Summary and next steps

The information gathered in this consultation was used in the development of SQA’s first Official Statistics publication - Attainment Statistics (August), with a publication date of 10 August 2021.

As indicated in the user consultation, a statistical summary accompanies this Official Statistics publication. Given the appetite for visualisations to help aid user understanding, charts are included in this statistical summary. SQA statistics will work towards providing further visualisations in the future such as infographics.

Machine readable data provisions (CSV) will be available upon request.

SIMD breakdowns of August results will be published in the Equalities Monitoring Report for 2021.

SQA statistics have considered the request on the timing of National Qualification breakdowns and have brought forward several publications. Please see our [Publication Schedule](#) for more information.

Further requests for breakdowns of statistical information published on our website will be considered in the future.

A redesign of our statistics webpages will also be considered in the future.

Further engagement will take place with users to ensure that we are meeting user needs, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.