

# Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 3 April 2023

## PE2014/A: Revert to the appeals system used in 2022 for SQA exams

Thank you for your e-mail of 4 April 2023 on behalf of the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee regarding Petition PE2014 seeking to “Revert to the appeals system used in 2022 for SQA exams”. I am replying as this guidance falls within my portfolio of responsibilities.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) is the awarding body for Scotland, as set out under the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. SQA is an executive Non-Departmental Public Body and as such operates at an arm’s length to Ministers. It follows that SQA is responsible for its own operational decisions around qualifications, which includes decisions on the appeals process for 2023.

I understand that studying toward qualifications can be stressful at the best of times and that the last few years have been extremely challenging for learners, parents, teachers, and others across our education system. Decisions are being taken with the best interests of learners at the centre.

The alternative approaches adopted in 2020, 2021 and 2022 were temporary, emergency measures, which were introduced in response to the pandemic and the specific circumstances in each of those years. A package of support remains in place this year but has rightly evolved to reflect the latest circumstances, and the approach to appeals is part of that evolution.

SQA carried out an extensive evaluation of the 2022 arrangements, engaging with over 3,500 learners, practitioners, parents and carers, including on appeals, which has helped to inform the approach for 2023. The 2023 approach seeks to ensure fairness to all learners while maintaining the integrity and credibility of the qualifications system.

In 2023, all learners will have the right to have a marker review of their exam paper or coursework, irrespective of their estimated grade - appeals in 2022 were only for those whose teacher estimates were above their certificated grades. Unlike prior to the pandemic – and

unlike the rest of the UK - the service will be free and learners will have direct access to it.

Alternative evidence will not be needed for the Appeals service this year. This should have reduced the time spent on assessment during the year, freeing up time for teaching and learning, which should be the priority, particularly in the context of COVID recovery.

An Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) is also available in 2023 for learners who are unable to attend their exam - for example, through illness or bereavement – or whose performance in the examination may have been affected by personal circumstances. SQA recognises that there are times when learners cannot sit an exam for reasons outside of their control, and it is important that the use of alternative evidence remains available for those learners who really need it. Scotland is the only country in the UK to offer such a service.

SQA has already confirmed that a sensitive, evidence-based approach to grading will be continued in 2023 and that existing modifications to the National Qualifications from 2022 are being continued in the 2023 academic session. These modifications vary by subject and level and may include removing or reducing elements of an exam or coursework, providing more choice or time during an assessment, or removing a topic from the exam. Whilst implemented to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, these measures will also help to mitigate disruption arising from teacher industrial action.

The former Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills issued an [open letter to learners](#) on 21 February setting out support available to learners during the industrial action. This support remains in place.

Support includes the National E-Learning Offer (NeLO) which continues to provide learners with thousands of live, recorded and online resources that support study and revision in preparation for this year's examinations and which can be accessed independently by learners at a time that suits them. The NeLO webpage offers learners a searchable database of nearly 25,000 senior phase resources across hundreds of courses which are updated regularly. This includes over 3,000 recorded lessons created by Scottish teachers which learners from all 32 local authorities are accessing regularly. Furthermore, as part of NeLO, all learners have been able to sign up for "live" and interactive evening study support webinars led by subject specialist teachers throughout the year, as well as interactive study support sessions held over the Easter break. In addition, many local authorities, schools and Regional

Improvement Collaboratives, often with partners, have been putting in place support for learners preparing for their exams.

I hope the Committee finds this letter helpful.

**Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills, Jenny Gilruth MSP**