

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF APPEALS 2000

REVIEW REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

August 2001

Background to the Review

1. 2000 was the first year of the New National Qualifications. The problems SQA had with issuing results and certificates for Diet 2000 affected stakeholders' confidence in the examination system. There was a large increase in the number of Appeals submitted to SQA and the number of unsuccessful Appeals was high. The Minister of Education, Mr Jack McConnell, announced on 12 December 2000 that there would be an Independent Review of any appeals that continued to give cause for concern.
2. Just over 4,200 requests for Review, across subjects and levels, were submitted. Around 120 candidates who had not appealed, were late Appeals or absentees, or whose Appeals were invalid, were subsequently withdrawn. By the end of the process the final number of cases was 4,080, just under 9% of the 47,136 unsuccessful Appeals from Diet 2000. Requests for Review in particular subjects often came from a small number of Centres or authorities.
3. Review teams were set up for each subject. As it was important to maintain standards, teams consisted of markers who had marked successfully in 2000. Three independent adjudicators were identified to deal with any cases that could not be agreed.

The Work of Review Teams

4. SQA located scripts and evidence for candidates in the Review. This process was far from straightforward and took longer than predicted, as it had not been anticipated that Appeals material would be needed again after the Appeals process was complete. Teams started work on 29 January.

5. Teams checked scripts and marks and looked for convincing evidence of performance at the grade sought. They were to act in the interests of fairness to candidates, while taking care not to erode the standards set at the time of the original marking. They identified 516 cases out of the 4080 where they thought an upgrade might be justified.
6. Principal Assessors considered all of these cases. They agreed with about half of the recommendations. The Adjudicators considered those cases where the Principal Assessors disagreed with a team's recommendation to upgrade a candidate. They agreed to improved grades in a further 43 cases.

Results of the Review

7. In total, upgrades were agreed for 317 cases: just under 8% of the total submitted for review, but under 1% of the total number of unsuccessful Appeals. At the end of the process, over 99% of the original Appeals results were unchanged, demonstrating the fairness of the original Appeals process.
8. Results of the Review were issued during March and April. In addition, reports were sent to Centres explaining why candidates had not received their estimated grade.
9. A number of individuals wrote to challenge the outcomes of the Review, mainly because they felt that the Centre's estimates and the final results were still inconsistent. All enquiries were fully investigated to ensure fairness to candidates, but care was also taken to ensure that the standards set at the original diet were not eroded.

Teams' Reflections on the Review Process

10. Prelims were frequently criticised by teams as being at too low a level of challenge, or for inadequately covering the content of the course. Many participants noted that Centres' understanding of how NABs could contribute to evidence for course assessment was very variable.

11. Almost all participants emphasised the need for clear and consistent advice and professional development relating to assessment, from SQA, education authorities and Learning and Teaching Scotland.
12. Team members suggested that there should be much more feedback from SQA about arrangement for marking, candidates' performance and adequacy of Centres' evidence, following each examination diet and round of Appeals.
13. Teams also suggested that more teachers might be given the opportunity to act as setters, vetters, moderators, markers and members of examining teams, to help them to understand the standards required.

Conclusions

14. The Review provided a mechanism to thoroughly and independently review the work of candidates where there was a significant concern about the outcome of the original appeals process. In the unique circumstances of last year, this mechanism was necessary to demonstrate the fairness of the system to individuals. While many individual candidates will have been disappointed by the outcome of the Review, the fact that less than 1% of original Appeals results were changed provides very strong reassurance about the fairness and quality of the original appeals process.
15. The Review was a necessary part of the process of re-establishing confidence in the examinations process. It led to teacher absence from school at a key time, and led to several thousand candidates waiting until Spring 2001 to hear the final outcome of their 2000 examinations. It achieved its objectives of dealing with the specific issues related to Diet 2000. At this time, it seems neither necessary nor desirable to repeat the Review.
16. Given the large number of failed requests, and the quality and relevance of the supporting evidence provided by some schools, it is clear that we need to establish a better common understanding of the standards applying in each subject, and the nature of the evidence required to support appeals. That understanding would be promoted by feedback from SQA to Centres about why individual appeals failed.

17. The process of the Review involved intensive debate and discussion about standards by teams of subject specialists, most of whom had not been members of SQA examining teams. They valued that experience and agreed it would be helpful to find ways of giving others that experience.

Issues for Consideration

18. Key issues arising from the Review of Appeals are identified below. Most of these will be addressed by SQA and by the National Qualifications Task Group, although they will also be of interest to Centres and their staff.
19. Centres, candidates and parents might benefit from more information about how fairness to candidates is achieved and who is involved in the examining system. SQA might consider giving Centres more information and feedback about the results of examinations for their candidates.
20. More participation by teachers in examination duties might help teachers to 'share the standard' required gain new National Qualifications.
21. Better understanding of the Appeals process might help to reduce the number of Appeals and improve the quality of evidence submitted to support them. Further advice could be issued to Centres about whether and how to appeal, and explaining the outcomes of Appeals.
22. In particular, clearer advice to everyone involved in the Appeals process should reduce the scope for confusion over the nature and status of evidence to be used to support on appeal.
23. Teachers have received a very considerable volume of information and updating associated with new National Qualifications. Every effort must be made to ensure this is sharply focused and meets their needs.