



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Education Children and Young People Committee

Fiona Robertson

T3.60

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The Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh

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By email only—

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Dear Fiona and Gill

Thank you for providing oral evidence to the Education, Children, and Young People Committee at its annual evidence session with SQA on Wednesday 13 September 2023. The official report of that meeting can be found [here](#). The Committee would like to follow up on and request additional information about matters that arose during the evidence session.

Attainment Gap, Demographic Data, and Equalities

During the session, you mentioned that SQA will be undertaking an analysis of learning gaps and course uptake which are subject to new variables. The Committee understands from your response that this assessment would aim to provide detail as to entry trends happening at the local authority level and across different year groups and how they affect National 5 mathematics courses, for example. You agreed to share your findings with the Committee when this analysis concludes (col 16).

The Committee also raised with you the fact that entries into the Gaelic-medium qualifications remain relatively low and asked whether the SQA has undertaken any

work to understand the reasons for that. You agreed to provide more information about the SQA's work in this area (col 17).

The Committee notes your [equalities impact assessments](#) which you mentioned during the session. You acknowledged that there is scope for further work to be done in liaison with the Scottish Government to assess the diversity and availability of courses and evaluate demographic data regarding progression (col 19). The Committee asks that you keep it updated on any progress you make on this front.

In relation to the variation of results associated with different SIMD areas leading to significantly different attainment gaps, you recognised that there is not a straightforward answer as to why variations exist; and that current research is not specific to Scotland (col 20). However, you acknowledged that you would need to do more analysis of why the attainment gap regresses as the level of education becomes higher (col 22). The Committee urges you to undertake further work on the variation of results associated with SIMD as part of that analysis and that you keep it informed of your findings.

In your evidence, you also mentioned research you published regarding teachers' estimates compared with the results achieved through external assessments (col 21). The Committee would appreciate a copy of this report to inform its work.

In relation to this and how the above-mentioned report addressed some of the concerns about the attainment gap, you mentioned that you would undertake further analysis of the return to exam and teachers' estimates (col 21). You also mentioned that you will undertake additional research on qualifications awarded in 2023 (col 22). The Committee would welcome a copy of your findings when these strands of work are completed.

Appeals and Outcomes

During the session, you provided justification for not continuing last year's alternative evidence appeals process based on considerations of fairness and concerns about the integrity and variability of the teachers' estimates and the assessment evidence. You also talked about the impact on successful outcomes and expressed concerns about comparing last year's appeals approach with this year's given the differences in methodology and the issue of fairness. To finish, you stated that there are currently 40,000 appeals and you are not able to comment on the appeal outcomes for this year and how they compare to previous years and pre-pandemic. You made a point that you would be reflecting and publishing data on appeal outcomes for 2023 and your new approach in due course (cols 28, 31). The Committee requests a copy of this data when it is available.

Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment

You agreed to provide more detail about the impact of the upcoming reform of SQA and its replacement by a new qualifications body by 2026 on your international work (col 36). The Committee would welcome further written information on this.

Communication with the profession and young people

The Committee would welcome clarification about how you consider stakeholders' feedback and the weight it is given in your decisions, especially where those decisions are at odds with the changes that the profession and young people have requested. You acknowledged that it was an evaluation you needed to do (cols 42-44).

The Committee thanks you again for your contributions to the session. However, the Committee notes the sometimes discursive and tangential nature of the session prevented full discussion of the range of issues it had hoped to cover within the allotted time. In advance of any similar sessions in future, I will ask the Committee clerks to engage with you to suggest an approach which might allow us collectively to obtain more value from our discussions.

The Committee would welcome a response to the points raised under the previous headings by **Friday 13 October 2023**, including a timeline for publication of the additional research you are currently undertaking on some of the points mentioned above.

Kind regards

Sue Webber MSP

Convener