



Appeals Process: Information for awarding bodies and standards setting organisations

Version 3 (February 2025)

Introduction

SQA Accreditation is responsible for regulating awarding bodies and accrediting their qualifications for delivery primarily in Scotland but also across the UK.

Operational responsibility for these functions lies with the Head of Accreditation, who reports to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive holds overall accountability for both SQA Accreditation and SQA's awarding body activities.

Oversight of all accreditation and regulatory activities is provided by SQA's Accreditation Committee (AC). The committee is chaired by a member of the Board and relies on SQA Accreditation to provide ongoing assurance of its effectiveness and fulfilment of responsibilities.

In carrying out its accreditation and regulation functions, while undertaking accreditation and regulation responsibilities, SQA Accreditation makes decisions and undertakes activities that may affect awarding bodies and standard setting organisations. These include approving qualification structures and accrediting qualifications, conducting audits of awarding bodies and undertaking provider monitoring activity.

This document outlines the grounds for appeal related to these decisions and activities, and provides the procedures for submitting an appeal. It also explains the scope and role of SQA's AC in handling appeal hearings.

We define an 'appeal' as a request for a review of a decision made by SQA Accreditation's Accreditation Co-ordination Group (ACG). As such, the processes set out in this document apply **only** to awarding bodies and standard setting organisations.

This document replaces The Appeals Process: Information for awarding bodies and standard setting organisations — version 2, published in March 2021 (code FA6894).

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1. Grounds for appeal

The sole basis for an appeal is that the decision made by ACG, based on the evidence available at the time, was incorrect. To establish this, you must demonstrate **either** that the decision was unreasonable or that there was procedural irregularity by ACG.

SQA Accreditation defines an unreasonable decision as one which:

- lacks plausible justification;
- involves the decision maker(s) considering irrelevant factors or failing to consider relevant ones;
- lacks reasons, or if the reasons were provided, these are unclear; or
- involves a breach of procedural requirement.

Each appeal will be considered on its individual facts and circumstances.

2. How to appeal

If your organisation wishes to appeal a decision made by the ACG, then a senior officer within your organisation should email ceo.office@sqa.org.uk, marked for the attention of the Head of the Chief Executive's Office. Alternatively, you can submit your appeal to:

Head of Chief Executive's Office
Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building
58 Robertson Street
Glasgow G2 8DQ

Whichever option you select, you must make it clear that the appeal is against a decision made by SQA Accreditation's ACG.

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Your appeal must normally be made within 20 working days of ACG's decision. The appeal must be submitted by a senior officer within your organisation.

When submitting your appeal, you must include the following:

- the date of the ACG meeting and the decision made
- a clear explanation of why you are appealing, setting out the basis for your appeal, including specific details
- copies of all relevant documents which support your appeal

The Chief Executive's Office will acknowledge receipt of your appeal within three working days and will keep you informed about any arrangements in relation to an appeal hearing.

If you submit an appeal and a separate [complaint](#) about SQA Accreditation at the same time, we will pause the appeal until the complaint has been investigated so that we can comply with the timelines for dealing with complaints as set out by the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO).

If the appeal is made in relation to a sanction issued by ACG, then the sanction may be suspended until the outcome of the appeal is known. For example, the sanction may be suspended, providing that it does not relate to or involve:

- inappropriate assessment of qualifications
- any risk of harm to candidates or to the public
- significant weaknesses relating to quality assurance of the qualifications

3. The appeal process

The appeal submission will be reviewed by the Head of the Chief Executive's Office or in their absence, a nominated representative, to determine that it constitutes a valid appeal. If it does not meet the grounds for an appeal, then you will be notified.

If the submission is deemed valid, an Extraordinary Meeting of the AC, independent of the ACG, will be held to hear the appeal. The Extraordinary Meeting of the AC must be quorate, meaning that it must involve more non-Board members than Board members. Members will be expected to declare any potential conflict of interest before joining the Extraordinary Meeting.

The Head of Accreditation will be notified of the appeal and its grounds but will not receive any documentation you submit. They will be invited to respond to the appeal and to provide relevant documentation supporting ACG's decision.

Based on the information provided by both parties, the AC Convenor will decide whether the appeal can be considered without the appealing party and SQA Accreditation being present. If required, the Convenor may invite one or both parties to attend the Extraordinary Meeting to seek clarification on any information submitted. Regardless of the approach taken, you will be notified of the date of the appeal hearing at least 30 working days in advance.

No additional documentation or evidence will be accepted once the hearing date has been set. The hearing date may only be rescheduled for the following reasons:

- unavailability of any member of the Extraordinary Accreditation Committee Meeting
- unavailability of the appealing party

Once we have confirmed the hearing date, the Convenor will only postpone a hearing in exceptional circumstances. When considering a request for postponing a hearing, the Convenor will ensure the appeal is handled effectively and efficiently.

If the Convenor requires either or both parties to attend, then the appealing party may be represented by up to two members of staff. The names and roles of attendees must be provided to the Head of the Chief Executive's Office at least five working days before the hearing. Similarly, SQA Accreditation may also have up to two representatives. Legal representation is not normally permitted.

If the Convenor deems that a hearing is necessary, then a member of staff from the Chief Executive's Office will be present to take notes on the proceedings. During the hearing, both parties will make separate oral submissions. SQA Accreditation staff will make the initial submission and then withdraw from the hearing. The appealing party will then make their submission before also withdrawing. Members of the AC may ask questions of both parties and may invite either party back for clarification. No new evidence may be introduced at the hearing.

Following the Extraordinary Meeting of the AC, both parties will normally be informed of the outcome within five working days. The decision letter serves as a written record of the meeting. The decision of the AC is final.

In addition to the appeals procedure, any formal complaint regarding SQA Accreditation's administration of the case can be submitted via the procedure detailed in our [Complaints Handling Procedure](#), available on [SQA Accreditation's website](#). This includes escalation to the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO), if necessary.