EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE

AGENDA

29th Meeting, 2000 (Session 1)

Wednesday 4 October 2000

The Committee will meet at 9.30 am in The Hub, Castlehill, Edinburgh

1. **Item to be taken in private:** The Convener will propose that item 2 be taken in private.

2. **School Exams Inquiry:** The Committee will consider lines of questioning to witnesses.

   *at approximately 10.00 am*

3. **School Exams Inquiry:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Educational Institute of Scotland:
   
   Margaret Nicol, President
   
   George MacBride, Convener, Education Committee
   
   Andrew Shanks, Principal Teacher, Montrose Academy
   
   National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers:
   
   John Kelly, Convener, Education Committee
   
   Secondary School Teachers Association:
   
   David Eaglesham, General Secretary

4. **School Exams Inquiry:** The Committee will take evidence from—

   Headteachers Association of Scotland:
   
   Pat Cairns, HAS Executive
5. **School Exams Inquiry: The Committee will take evidence from**—

   Ron Tuck, former Chief Executive, Scottish Qualifications Authority

   David Elliot, former Director of Awards, Scottish Qualifications Authority

6. **Update of Committee business:** The Committee will be updated on business in its current work programme.

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The following papers are attached for this meeting—

- Evidence from the Educational Institute of Scotland ED/00/29/1
- Evidence from the National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers ED/00/29/2
- Evidence from the Secondary School Teachers Association ED/00/29/3
- (All above agenda item 3) Evidence from the Headteachers Association of Scotland ED/00/29/4
- (Agenda item 4)
SUBMISSION TO MEETING OF ECP COMMITTEE OF SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT, 4th OCT, 2000

Number references are to the bullet points, in order, in the Terms of Reference.

1. No comment

2. Needless distress to candidates.

3. (i) SOA wildly underestimated requirement for number of markers
   (ii) time for marking too short - later exams same publication date. Would it not be better to delay Scottish results to co-incide with English and meet same UCAS deadline?
   (iii) Why were the computer checks not run?
   (iv) The veil of secrecy over concordance/discordance in a particular subject must be removed. It is patently unjust for a discordant department to remain in ignorance of its failings and so potentially damage the future prospects of generations of students.
   (v) The imperative of attendance at markers' meeting must be restored.

Problems include:-

- Unnecessary complexities of data entry and recording at SOA e.g.:-
  7 at SCE = B
  7 at Higher Skill = fail
  7 at 'S' Grade = course complete

- Data sent to SOA but not acted upon e.g. estimates from schools and presentation levels

- Failure to pilot the software c.f. Passport Office and Benefit Agency.

Implementation of H Skill:-

- Timetable was politically driven (by both governments) and educational arguments were discounted as obstruction.
- Delay of subjects in August 1999 caused the complexity mentioned in "problems" above.

4. No comment

5. Listen to the profession

John Kelly
Convener Education Committee
NASUWT Scotland
SCHOOL EXAM RESULTS INQUIRY

EVIDENCE FROM

SCOTTISH SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

22 SEPTEMBER, 2000

15 Dundas Street
Edinburgh
EH3 6QG
SCHOOL EXAM RESULTS INQUIRY
EVIDENCE FROM SCOTTISH SECONDARY TEACHERS’ ASSOCIATION

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Association has been appalled by the chaotic situation which has developed in the outcome of the 2000 Examination Diet. We are also deeply concerned that there has been much ill-informed comment and speculation which have only served to turn a crisis into a drama. We earnestly hope that this Inquiry by the Committee will cut through such distractions and focus clearly on the key issues so that future examinations can regain the high level of credibility they previously enjoyed.

1.2 In our evidence we will concentrate on bullet points 3, 4 and 5 as detailed in the terms of reference within the letter of invitation, with a brief reference to point 2.

2. IMPACT ON PUPILS

2.1 There was clearly a great deal of upset caused to many pupils because of the problems which arose. In cold analysis, however, it is not clear what actual impact has occurred for any individual. We are concerned that much of the perceived injustice and upset was, in fact, more to do with the presentations in the media, and that we are in real danger of falsely creating a “damned” generation on the altar of political rhetoric and pressure. There appear to be cases where pupils have, in the final analysis, been disadvantaged. In these cases, no cost or effort is too great to be used to rectify their problems, even if it requires exceptional means. We have continuously pressed for this to happen since August, and so far many appropriate steps have been/
been taken. What the Committee must not allow to happen, however, is for the near hysteria which took place to become formally enshrined, and in so doing condemn a whole generation of young people to be deemed to have “failed”, when in fact the system failed them.

3. CAUSES OF PROBLEMS

3.1 MARKING PROCESS

3.1.1 We have considerable evidence that serious problems occurred in the organisation of marking, but very little evidence of any problems in the marking itself.

3.1.2 Marking invitations were, again, as in 1999, delayed from the (usual) January to late March. We raised this issue initially with SQA at Easter 1999. This delay caused considerable problems in ensuring that adequate numbers of markers were available, and exacerbated the unseemly rush to recruit too late in the day. Many experienced markers declined to mark due to the reduced timescale (from 3 to 2 weeks) lower payments, and a later marking-time schedule then before. Had this been dealt with in February, the problem of later/inappropriate recruitment would have been eliminated or greatly reduced, and the unseemly spectacle of “bidding up” marking fees avoided.

3.1.3 The problem in 2001 is likely to be worse due to the very late payment to markers, and the huge discontent they now feel about the whole process. Very early measures need to be put in place to reassure staff on these points so as to ensure adequate availability of markers for 2001.

3.1.4 That said, we have encountered (so far) no solid evidence that marking procedures were corrupted/
corrupted or that marksmen did not exercise due diligence at all times. The almost hysterical nature of some of the allegations which emerged has done great harm to teachers, their current and future pupils, and the system as a whole and is greatly to be regretted.

3.1.5 We are currently surveying those members who have key knowledge in this area, and hope to furnish the Committee with the outcome of this at the time of our oral evidence.

3.2 ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS

3.2.1 Schools experienced considerable problems in SQA procedures, including pupils missing from exam entry lists, pupils entered and then “disappearing” from lists, and even pupils “disappearing” from post examination lists (as late as September). Data was frequently resubmitted more than once, forms which accompanied material received at SQA were later said to be missing.

3.2.2 Deadlines for submission of materials were set without regard for school holiday patterns, and forms for submission were frequently sent too late for timeous submission. Insufficient examination papers were sent to schools.

3.2.3 As an Association we met with SQA in April to air our concerns. We were told of computer incompatibility and data management problems, and we agreed to have SQA send paper details on entries for exams to all schools for verification. This was then done. At that stage we were given to understand that this exercise would eliminate all the errors which had occurred to date.

We/
we were also told that additional papers would be produced for all schools, even where no pupil was scheduled to sit a particular exam.

3.2.4 At a subsequent meeting in June, we became aware that further problems had arisen but at that meeting, and in later meetings and in telephone conversations in June, July and August, we were assured that the problems were at a minimal level, and only related to missing internal gradings which should have been easily retrievable from schools.

3.2.5 As events unfolded, it was clear that this was far from an accurate assessment. Our view is, however, that the information being given to us was, to the best belief of the SQA officials, wholly correct. We do not believe that they attempted to deceive us in what they imparted.

3.2.6 At this point, we cannot offer explanations of why these problems arose. Our role has to be confined to describing them and the way in which they became manifest.

3.2.7 Other factors contributed to problems with pupil results. The contracting of the examination diet (in order to accommodate the length of courses imposed in Higher Still) led to pupils sitting two separate subject examinations on one day, and often four major examinations in one week. The timetabling of the examination diet was flawed and bureaucratic, lacking true awareness of young people and their capacity to perform.

3.2.8 The unannounced change in banding procedures left schools unaware of the effects this would have on pupil performance. The huge over-emphasis on Internal Assessment not only created data/
data management problems, but also led to pupils being over-assessed and suffering 
"examination fatigue". Major internal assessments were often being carried out immediately 
before the SQA Diet. The obligation to have bi-level teaching of classes which Higher Still 
effectively imposes is also detrimental. Two groups of pupils in one class cannot each have 
100% of teacher attention at one time.

3.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER STILL

3.3.1 This is a key issue and lies at the heart of the process.

3.3.2 At the initial stages, this Association was told that certain key principles were immutable. These 
were the unitisation of all courses at all levels, the use of a hugely increased internal assessment 
element as a dominant feature of all courses at all levels; and the insistence on limiting external 
examinations to 3 hours, including intervals between papers. All of these contributed greatly to 
the chaos which ensued. Principles dominated practicality throughout the process, such that the 
repeated warnings given by the Association were ignored or deflected.

3.3.3 We regularly raised problems of late or very late delivery of promised materials, inconsistent 
quality in materials, late changes in NAB materials, inconsistent (and thus misleading) advice at 
training/briefing meetings, inconsistencies on advice or assessment and reassessment, changing 
of advice without full national notification. On every occasion, whether at the Higher Still 
Liaison Group, or meetings with Ministers and officials, we were accused of over-reacting and 
misreporting. We were, in point of fact, relaying the reports of secondary teachers all over 
Scotland.

3.3.4/
3.3.4 Of particular concern was the "cascade" model of dissemination of information. Meetings were often, but not always, poorly run and badly organised. Frequently crucial changes were announced almost casually to those in attendance, leaving any non-attendees to glean details on a "grapevine". This is a flawed method, unsuitable for primary dissemination of vital information.

3.3.5 All of these factors, though stated very briefly, made a huge contribution to uncertainty and misapprehension among teachers and indeed pupils. As a means of introducing any future change, such a model must never be used again.

3.3.6 The Association's insistence that Higher Still would not be ready has been shown to be wholly justified. The only reason that the huge cracks in the system did not have a more profound effect on pupil performance was the extraordinary effort made by Scottish secondary teachers over the past 18 months. This co-operation was not willingly given, because we had highlighted the inadequacies well ahead of time, but it was given because teachers always put the best interests of pupils at the top of their list of priorities. Those who impugned our motivations and integrity 18 months ago should now deliver a wholehearted apology to the profession.

4. ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE

4.1 This Association supported the principle of introducing Higher Still for the good of senior pupils in our schools. We were, initially, publicly vilified by certain other organisations for our stance. We maintained our stance, and in due course, these other bodies joined us there.

4.2/
4.2 We repeatedly indicated that the development could only proceed if it was reformed in its structure and proposed practices, fully and timeously resourced, and fully supported by teachers.

4.3 From an early stage, it was clear that problems would become very evident. The over-ambitious plans led to postponement, albeit grudgingly conceded by the previous government.

4.4 In June 1997, the Association met with the then Minister, Brian Wilson, and officials from HMI and SOED. We welcomed the decision to delay for a further year, but warned that the delay must be put to good use or we would end up in a repeat situation.

4.5 We reiterated this at similar meetings in January 1998 and May 1998, and at a meeting with the then new Minister, Helen Liddell, in October 1998. The reaction from HMI in January 1998 was almost patronisingly dismissive, while in May 1998 it was both aggressive and ill-judged. It was clear at both the latter meeting (May 1998) and at the meeting with Helen Liddell in October 1998, that Ministers had begun to understand that there was conflicting advice coming from HMI and HSDU on the one hand and professional associations on the other.

4.6 Unfortunately, this clarity did not lead to as effective a product as could have been expected. The formation of the Higher Still Liaison Group was the only positive outcome. Within this, the realism of the voices of parent groups and others led to some progress. However, this Association was still met with bland reassurances of timetables being met and materials delivered. Experientially, this was not happening, but again, the voice of teachers – in this case all of the unions in one united choir – was largely ignored. We were repeatedly accused of pandering/
pandering to the unwillingness of teachers to embrace change. The reality was that we were reporting the inadequacies and not getting a listening ear. The compromise of allowing schools to go ahead or not on the basis of preparedness was a classic “fudge”. It led to an inconsistent approach and fostered uncertainties. As previously stated, teachers did their utmost to make the best of the situation and largely succeeded.

4.7 The underlying problem seems to have been a political determination that the so-called “flagship” programme had to go ahead regardless of its readiness. What political end this served is unclear, but it was flawed. This determination clearly influenced local decisions about whether or not to be in Phase 1. Most regrettable of all, however, is that the determination failed to take account of the now obvious inability of the SQA to resource the change at the due date.

4.8 The Association was aware of unsubstantiated rumours that the SQA was unable to cope with the change, but could find no hard facts on which to pursue this as an issue.

4.9 Given the access that SOEID/SEED had and has to SQA through HMI and other sources, it is clearly regrettable that this was not pursued by these bodies either.

4.10 It is a matter of even greater regret that political imperative was put before a consensus approach to this matter. We are, as an Association, currently meeting as part of the Implementation Group on the McConne Report set up by the current Minister, Sam Galbraith. The aim of the Group is to reach a consensus on teachers pay and conditions, and it is to be hoped that this, difficult though it may be, can be achieved.

4.11/
4.11 This was not the model adopted for Higher Still, and it is the contention of this Association that the problems experienced in this year’s examination can be largely blamed on the failure of the implementation process which was used.

5. FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 We append a paper written by a senior member of the Association and distributed by us to all schools. This sets out clearly some of the key issues which must be attended to and we commend its contents to the Committee.

5.2 With regard to the vexed question of how confidence can be restored, we would argue that the Committee, the SQA, the Executive and the Minister need to take the advice which would be given by parents to pupils, "Listen to the teacher".

5.3 It was the excellent reputation of Scottish teachers that brought the excellent reputation of Scottish examinations to the attention of the world. It was the singular failure to listen to these same teachers that led to the present crisis. The expertise to deal with most aspects of the problem lies with the members of this Association and other teachers. This cannot be distilled in a single document, so complex is the system, but it can be obtained by direct contact on the specific points which need to be clarified. The Association will be happy to nominate teachers to contribute to this as necessary. This process will take longer to reach success than may be imagined, but it must be undertaken.
6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Association appreciates the opportunity to make its views clear on these matters. While some of the more technical aspects can only be dealt with from within SQA, our members are best placed to deal with all other aspects.

6.2 Our members will do all in their power to rectify the current problems. We look to the Committee to establish the framework in which it will be possible for us to do this effectively. To ignore the views of our members now and in the future would be to further jeopardise the prospects of young people in Scotland. We are confident that the Committee will achieve their aims in this respect.
SCOTTISH SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Response to the present Scottish Qualifications Authority crisis.

This paper was produced by one of the senior members of the Association who is experienced in matters relating to the SQA, and in particular co-ordinates the SQA procedures in his school.

This will be part of the representations to be made by the Association to the SQA.

1 Introduction

1.1 The problems associated with this year's SQA results are well documented and there is little point in rehearsing them over and over. Suffice to say that although many of the problems and difficulties were foreseen by practitioners and intimated to the SQA by the Association, the enormity of the SQA's failure to deliver (literally) took everyone by surprise.

1.2 I feel it is now time to look forward, to ensure that this, and subsequent years' SQA administration run smoothly and efficiently, resulting in the timely and accurate delivery of course awards as rightly expected by students, teachers and tertiary education.

1.3 I also feel that the problem is not Higher Still. While there is no doubt that the registration and entry of candidates for Higher Still units and courses and the reporting of unit assessments and predictions is over-complicated and excessively time-consuming, the problems of this year's diet lie with the management of data at the SQA end, and at the interface of SEEMIS/Phoenix with both schools and the SQA.

1.4 My intention in this paper is to suggest ways in which these difficulties can be overcome with a view to:
  - Improving accuracy
  - Reducing teacher/management workload
  - Improving ongoing feedback from the SQA

1.5 To do this, it is necessary to highlight critical incidents during last session and consider improvements which will lead to a streamlined procedure with fewer opportunities for errors to occur un-noticed until it is too late.

2 Critical incident 1

2.1 Schools encountered difficulties in entering candidates for units and courses in time for the September deadline.

2.2 Solution? This was caused by the lack of readiness of SEEMIS and Phoenix systems to interface with the SQA machinery. Although many of the difficulties were eventually resolved, it was several weeks/months before all units and courses were successfully transmitted and received. Much time was spent in schools carrying out this task, and those responsible were often told to resubmit the information or attempt another way of doing so. Music and Modern Studies were typically problematic, and it seems that problems had to be encountered before fixes were made. (See Summing up section for further suggestion.) This is typical of a system where no trialling was undertaken. In future, all data systems must be up, running and tested before being put into operation.

3 Critical incident 2

3.1 In spite of frequent requests, the SQA was unable to confirm any entries for units and courses until February. This led many senior managers to worry at the integrity of their entries. Although SEEMIS and Phoenix confirmed receipt of data, the SQA was unable or unwilling to do the same. If it had, the problems encountered later in the year would have been averted.

3.2/
3.2 Solution? It is essential that speedy confirmation of all entries received by the SQA be received by the school to allow action to be taken if there are errors or omissions.

4 Critical Incident 3

4.1 Immediately prior to the Easter Holiday (early April) was the first time the SQA set alarm bells ringing when it requested a full data check to be carried out by schools. This was a very time-consuming task, impinging on subject principals at a very short time scale. The alarm bells rang even more loudly in late June when the SQA required schools to carry out an audit of all entries. In some cases, this request was made after the schools had broken up for the summer holiday and it necessitated the return of senior managers to carry out the task.

4.2 Solution? Early confirmation of entries as indicated above would have obviated the need for this exercise.

5 Critical Incident 4

5.1 Subject departments were initially asked to ensure that at least one unit was entered with a completion date of December. This would allow moderation to be carried out, should it be deemed necessary. This was clearly inappropriate in subjects in which units were taught in parallel, and it was agreed that March could be selected as a completion date in these circumstances. In the event, very little moderation was carried out, and when it was, the result of moderation was, in some cases, not intimated until after the course examination was completed. This led to uncertainty in teachers and students, who were unsure whether or not the examination for which they were studying was of any value. If moderation was unsuccessful, the possibility of asking students who had left school to return to sit one or more unit assessments to validate their examination is unacceptable.

5.2 Solution? In future, all moderation must be completed and results notified to school well in advance of the examination period.

6 Critical Incident 5

6.1 In July, the SQA requested that a member of staff who was au fait with the administration procedures was available for the first three weeks of July. This is a totally unacceptable request and it relies on the good will of staff who would do anything to ensure pupils were not disadvantaged. In the event, in my own school this required an SMT member to spend two days (25/26 July) hand writing results on to 168 results sheets and submitting them to the SQA to ensure results were accurately recorded. Certificates issued by the SQA omitted many (but not all) of these results.

6.2 Solution? This must not happen again. Although staff will always respond to an emergency, it cannot be an assumption that they are always available during holiday periods. The SQA does not employ school staff; therefore it cannot make demands on their time. That is the local authorities’ prerogative. The SQA did not inform the local authorities that they were requesting this support.

7 Critical Incident 6

7.1 The delivery to the schools of supporting paperwork was disorganised, illogical and often late. Schools had frequently to ask for paperwork for practical submissions and the format of these sheets were very different from previous years. This applied to Standard Grade as well as Higher Still. There were many more sheets of paper to be completed and this could have contributed to the loss of some results.

7.2 Solution? The procedural aspects of the old SEB which related to practical submissions was clearly understood and meticulously prepared. We must seek a return to this principle.

8 Critical Incident 7

8.1/
8.1 Forms issued by the SQA often contained only unit codes which took time to decipher.

8.2 Solution? All forms issued must contain both unit codes and the name of the course (if appropriate) to which they pertain.

9 Critical Incident 8

9.1 The SQA issued, in June 1999, a time-line which described all relevant dates for entries of candidates to units and courses and the periods of moderation. This time-line was abandoned as the session progressed, as a result of many of the data management problems described above. This led to uncertainty at school level as to what was and what was not acceptable, and when this was raised at meetings with the SQA the “It'll be alright on the night” approach was frequently heard. Whilst this was reassuring to some extent, I believe that this was one of the main problems facing the SQA. No one actually knew if it would be all right on the night. There seemed to be a blind assumption that “together we can work it out”, but there was a limit to the degree to which this was possible.

9.2 Solution? The successful administration of such a complex set of procedures requires that all the participant partners know exactly what is expected of them. Time-lines must be realistic and, in all but the extreme emergency, adhered to. School staff feel confident in this and can work towards them. The problem arose, of course because the time-line was set without knowledge of the practical aspects of introducing a new system of qualifications at the same time as a complex piece of software. In addition, the go-between (SEEMIS/Phoenix) was evolving to respond to the situation as difficulties arose. All too often we were told “that's a new problem – leave it with us and we'll get back to you with a solution”.

10 Summing up

10.1 Several key issues arise here.

- All further developments must be put to trial before being implemented
- The interfaces between SEEMIS/Phoenix and both the SQA and schools must be tried and tested before being put into operation in future
- There must be speedy and accurate feedback from the SQA to schools to highlight potential problems before they become unsolvable
- Unacceptable demands must not be placed on school staff, either during term time or during contractual holiday periods
- Where former SEB procedures worked effectively (e.g. submission of practical assessments), these should be retained
- Data and paperwork from the SQA must be clear and easily understood
- A rigorous and realistic time-line for procedures must be adopted and adhered to in all cases, although there should be some flexibility for school emergencies, e.g. staff illness.
- Unit and course entry procedures should be simplified, as suggested below.

11 Unit and course entries

11.1 In my own school with 270 students in S6/8, the process of entering students for units/courses and recording results is unacceptably time-consuming and repetitive. Well over 100 hours of my year have been involved in this exercise, and although it is not a high level skill, it still requires the involvement of someone who understands what it is all about. I hope to delegate the more when there is confidence in the reliability of the data management systems. Even then, an experienced eye will still be required to monitor the procedure. 270 students equates to approximately 250 individual course entries, 3,750 unit entries and a further 3,750 results. Add deferred results and reinstatements (around 1,000) to give nearly 10,000 actions each year. Unfortunately, this year many of these actions had to be repeated once or twice, or even three times!

11.2 The huge majority of students following courses will undertake the same units and course across Scotland. In Mathematics at Higher, Int2/1, all students complete three units called Mathematics 1, Mathematics 2 and Mathematics 3. Surely there must be a way in which entering a student for
THE SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT'S EDUCATION, CULTURE AND SPORT COMMITTEE'S INQUIRY INTO SCHOOLS' EXAM RESULTS

H.A.S. RESPONSE

1. DATA MANAGEMENT In marked contrast with the Scottish Examination system's previous reputation for reliability and validity, SQA's evolving system, still halfway through its development, was clearly the principal cause of this year's disastrous internal problems for SQA. Returns from across a whole range of schools confirm the well publicised problems, namely:

- repeatedly requested duplicate information on internal grades and internally assessed elements
- omissions and incorrect information from SQA despite duplicate accurate information being provided by schools
- lost estimate data
- difficulty in satisfactorily linking the range of school administration packages (SEEMS, PHOENIX and SIMS) to SQA's computer system.

2. CONCERNS ABOUT MARKING These have been largely played down by SQA. Hard evidence from a range of reliable sources has confirmed the perception of a lack of security over the marking and 'perception is reality'. For example, one school's results for Higher Information Systems were 7 fails at band 9, 3 at band 8, 2 at 76 and 1 pass at band 5, for 13 candidates all estimated at 1, 2 or 3. This was corrected to 13 band 1 passes and then further corrected to 1 at band 1, 1 at band 3, 2 at band 3, 3 at band 2, 4 at band 4, 2 at band 5 and 1 at band 6.

A second example in another school was Higher Computing Studies in which all students received grades below expectations. The school's estimates have always previously been accurate in this subject, the school was moderated successfully for internal assessments and has a top grade 'A' marker on the staff.

Clearly, the recruitment of markers had presented a serious problem. Our evidence contains examples of:

- good markers not being contacted
- markers receiving several additional allocations, including after the deadline for marking
- scripts being sent to non-markers
- markers being asked to change from G/F to G/C at Standard Grade on the day before the markers meeting
- markers processing scripts from candidates in their own schools
- significant use of inexperienced markers

The SQA's decision to allow centres to amend estimates at the time of appeals is to be regretted. 'Pushy, articulate parents' who have demanded that an appeal be submitted, even when their son/daughter performed in line with the estimate, have advantaged their children, with lawyers quoting 'your school or college can still make an appeal, and you should discuss this with the staff there'.
3. EFFECT ON PUPILS, PARENTS AND STAFF

a) Pupils: The pupils have been hardest hit. Many have been disillusioned by being issued with incorrect certificates and have been unable to seek reassurance from their teachers - the very people who, throughout the academic year, have been emphasizing the importance of doing well in these examinations. Pupils who have left school to enter employment will have no chance to improve in these grades. Applicants for Further and Higher Education have had decisions based on the 'predicted grade' given on the UCAS form. This had to be submitted before 15 December 1999 and consequently is of less reliability than the class teacher's 'estimated grade' towards the end of the teaching session for the SQA. It would seem certain that the 'post appeal' pass rate will be significantly greater than normal as the 'pre-appeal' rate is about normal, but to be topped up with many more appeals. This will result in a continuing questioning of 2000's results.

Pupils need to be encouraged and urgent action should be taken to restore confidence in the examination process.

b) Parents: Many parents could not believe that the schools did not have a copy of results. Many were dismayed to find teaching staff asking them what their children received. As discussed earlier, some middle class parents have been seeking advantage for their children.

c) Staff: Teaching staff in schools have been inundated with requests for appeals. Many teachers are at a loss, having been placed in an invidious position with no answers to parents. The fact that results were not issued to schools at the same time as to pupils made it impossible to advise/confirm etc..

Teaching and administrative staff have spent many hours furnishing SQA with data which had already been submitted.

SQA passed the responsibility of dealing with upset and angry parents and pupils by publishing inaccurate information.

School SQA coordinators in particular were required to be available for a very heavy workload throughout the summer.

Overall, the extra time involved in SQA activities this session has had an effect on school life, with less 'Time for Teaching' and more time spent on administration. This cannot happen again!

4. COMMUNICATIONS: While acknowledging that there may have been a state of almost panic at SQA, poor communications were very unhelpful, e.g.

- Schools were assured that all would be well. There might be a few teething problems, but nothing of major significance. Results would be available on 10 August. This proved to be far from the reality.
- Many candidates who telephoned SQA were told that the 'schools had not forwarded the results of the Internal Assessments'. This was clearly not the case.
- Several press statements were misleading.
5. **IMPLEMENTATION OF HIGHER STILL.** Consideration has to be given to the place of Internal Assessments in relation to final grades achieved. While they have been motivating, giving short term targets for students, it is clear that, other than being necessary pre-hurdles to the final exam, they do not presently contribute to course awards. With the continuing reliance on performance in the final exam, the reduction in this exam obviously reduces its reliability as one 'rogue' answer can have a more significant effect on final total marks.

6. **OTHER ISSUES** Principal Assessors reported problems with the system from December 1999. Markers were appointed late, as SQA were tied up appointing Moderators etc. Candidates were not registered in time, and SQA did not know how many markers were needed until too late.

The new later finish to the exams (June 12) meant that problems did not fully surface until well into the school holidays, and by that time it was difficult to deal with them as it was a heavy burden on schools to provide information during the holiday period.

7. **SUGGESTED ACTION** There are three major 'hot spots' which HAS feels should be addressed:

a) The current administrative procedures require to be looked at to ensure that SQA can deal with the increasing Higher Still demands this session.

b) The quality assurance and management within SQA must be able to deal with this session's assessments.

c) The Higher Still Liaison Group requires to meet as a matter of urgency to identify and remove the stress points. We support the recent suggestions by Scottish Parent Teacher Council in particular in relation to the status of unit assessments. We also support the delay in the introduction of Group Awards and the second diet of examinations until the basic Higher Still programme is functioning in a satisfactory manner.

Other specific suggested strategies are to

* expand the role of the subject Principal Assessors, and pay them accordingly
* give them more responsibility for the recruitment of markers, monitoring of processes and procedures
* appoint several seconded Principal Assessors as 'internal monitors' to oversee procedures from their perspective
* likewise, second a number of school SQA Coordinators to give their perspective on data management.
* have earlier exam diets, to finish by 1 June. Problems could then be dealt with during school term. More time for markers to do their work fully. Less demand on examining teams to work into mid-July.

Finally it is clear that standard tables and target setting data cannot be published in the present circumstances and should be suspended for this year.