



Evaluation of the 2024 Access to Marked Exam Papers trial

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Key themes

Usage

There were 7,256 unique course Access to Marked Exam Papers (AtMEP) downloads, representing 17.3% of available marked exam papers. This varied across subjects, from 10.6% of National 5 Music marked exam paper downloads to 42.3% for Advanced Higher Statistics.

There does not seem to be any download pattern when looking at learners' Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) quintile, but independent schools' download rate was 28.8% compared to local authority schools' download rate of 16.4%. However, download rates across local authorities varied considerably. The highest numbers of downloads were from Glasgow (832) and Edinburgh (648), but the highest proportions were from Orkney Islands (45.8% of entries) and South Ayrshire (43.8% of entries). Midlothian only had 11 downloads (1.9% of entries).

There was some feedback from stakeholders on a lack of awareness of the AtMEP trial, which may partially account for the relatively low level of downloads. However in general, both learner and practitioner participants were positive about both the content and timing of communication and guidance from SQA. It is likely, then, that concerns around workload contributed more to the low proportion of downloads.

Overall, 83% of learner survey respondents and 65% of practitioner survey respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the AtMEP service this year (4% of learners and 22% of practitioners disagreed).

Purpose

The evaluation highlighted a lack of clarity in stakeholders' minds on the purpose of AtMEP. While its main intended purpose is to inform learner decisions on appeals, this was not reflected in the views of stakeholders.

Only 14% of learner survey respondents suggested that they had used their marked exam paper to decide whether or not to appeal, while 74% said that they had used it

to learn from. They thought the main benefits of AtMEP were assessing performance, identifying strengths and weaknesses, and learning from mistakes.

Looking at downloads by grade possibly illustrates that AtMEP was used for purposes other than appeals. 18.3% of marked exam papers that had been awarded an A grade were downloaded, but the download rate decreased across grades and was 13.7% for No Award marked exam papers. Practitioner participants confirmed that high attaining learners were more likely to access their marked exam papers.

In senior appointee and qualification manager (QM) interviews, there were comments that AtMEP could play a part in learner decisions on appeal. However, these comments were relatively few and often coupled with concerns about how accessible or useful practitioners and learners, particularly, would find marked exam papers, given a lack of detailed knowledge about marking processes and tolerances. More commonly, these interviewees saw the value of AtMEP being about transparency and, especially, practitioner continuing professional development (CPD).

Liaison managers reported frustration from some centres that they could not use marked exam papers in a way which they felt would be most useful to them. Centres thought that AtMEP could be a helpful resource, and some had anticipated its potential benefits in terms of CPD. They were therefore disappointed when they did not or could not get learner permission to access marked exam papers.

Reflecting where centres see the main benefits, 74% of practitioner survey respondents agreed that AtMEP would inform their teaching practice and 76% agreed that it would enhance CPD. Most practitioner comments on AtMEP's potential benefits referenced teaching and learning and further staff development, particularly around the understanding of standards.

Therefore, 79% of practitioner respondents agreed that they would like to make more use of anonymised marked exam papers in the classroom. Relatedly, 75% of learner respondents agreed that seeing anonymised marked exam papers from other learners would be helpful, and 79% agreed that they would be comfortable with their own marked exam paper being anonymised for other learners to see.

While the evaluation suggests that AtMEP was not used primarily to support learner decisions on appeals, it is worth noting that the appeal rate for downloaded marked exam papers was higher than for non-downloaded papers (13.7% compared to 6.9%). The appeal success rate was also higher for downloaded marked exam papers than non-downloaded papers (10.5% compared to 7.5%). This varied across subjects. However, there are some caveats around this data; we cannot know how much of a role, if any, marked exam papers played in decisions to appeal.

Learner permission model

Most, but not all, practitioner survey respondents reported that their school got written permission before downloading marked exam papers; most, but not all, learner survey respondents reported that they had given written permission before their marked exam paper was downloaded.

67% of learner survey respondents agreed that it is important that their school has their written permission before accessing their marked exam paper. However, 27% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Practitioner survey respondents' views were more mixed: 45% agreed that it is right that learners should have to give their written permission, but 38% disagreed.

Antipathy towards the learner permission model on the part of some practitioners related both to the perception that it limits the usefulness of the service for CPD — some practitioners had tried and failed to get permission from learners to view their marked exam papers — and that it increases centre workload. Indeed, liaison manager feedback and comments from some practitioners suggested that if the service were to remain learner led, then it should be learner direct, without involving centres downloading marked exam papers, or that centres should be able to collect learner permission before the summer holidays.

Workload

When the trial was announced, concerns about centre workload dominated, particularly in centre and local authority discussions with liaison managers. These

concerns included the administration of getting written learner permission, downloading marked exam papers, and practitioners potentially needing to go through papers with learners. Moreover, apprehensions were associated not just with the direct impact of the AtMEP service but also the whole range of other demands that SQA places on centres early in the school year, including appeals.

However, the evaluation found that these workload concerns were largely not borne out. This was shown through the Liaison Team and QM interviews, practitioner interviews, and in the practitioner survey results. Nonetheless, 36% of practitioner survey respondents said that the level of support learners required was very substantial or substantial, and 39% said that the administration workload associated with AtMEP was very substantial or substantial. However, only 13% said the number of queries from parents and carers related to AtMEP was very substantial or substantial. Moreover, only 11% of learner survey respondents thought that they were not offered enough support when reviewing their marked exam paper.

It is worth noting that SQA co-ordinators (20% of practitioner survey respondents) had notably different views compared to non-SQA co-ordinators around workload. SQA co-ordinators found the administrative workload more substantial, were less supportive of expanding AtMEP to more subjects, and were less likely to think scaling up AtMEP would be manageable.

Therefore, anxieties about centre workload have not been wholly alleviated and remain a real concern, particularly if AtMEP is scaled up to include more subjects. Workload was frequently cited by practitioners when they were asked about the drawbacks of the AtMEP service. The relatively low level of downloads and the limited number of subjects included this year means that there are still concerns that workload associated with AtMEP could increase substantially. Furthermore, the Liaison Team highlighted that there were centres and local authorities that decided not to advertise the service to learners, which may have assuaged workload issues to an extent this year.

Scaling up

97% of learner survey respondents agreed that marked exam papers should be made available in more subjects in the future; this was the main theme that came through when they were asked about improvements to the AtMEP service. And despite the workload concerns highlighted above, 71% of practitioner survey respondents agreed that the AtMEP trial should be expanded to more subjects (20% disagreed) and 53% agreed that scaling up the service would be manageable (29% disagreed).

Concerns about scalability from senior appointees and QMs largely revolved around marking scrutiny and the issues this could cause if practitioners and learners do not fully understand marking processes. Indeed, 78% of practitioner survey respondents agreed that they would benefit from more information on marking practices such as grade boundaries and marking tolerances.

While senior appointee and QM interview participants highlighted the quality of marking and the robustness of quality assurance processes, they acknowledged the potential for mistakes or misunderstandings that could have a reputational impact on the organisation. While practitioners were not asked directly about marking, perceived issues with marking or marking inconsistencies did emerge as a theme in their comments.

Introduction

Acknowledgements

SQA is extremely grateful to respondents and participants for their assistance with this research. This includes learner and practitioner survey respondents, practitioner interview participants, QM and senior appointee interview participants, and Liaison Team focus group participants.

The authors are also grateful for the contributions to and support for this research from the Policy, Analysis and Standards Administration Team, the AtMEP Project Team, and the SQA co-ordinators who disseminated our research requests.

Context

In 2023, a pilot access to scripts project was undertaken. This involved a free service, which involved nine centres with access to National 5 Geography and Media marked exam papers. Evaluation of the pilot involved a survey of centre staff and face-to-face engagement sessions.

While valuable as a proof of concept, the 2023 pilot's small scale meant that relatively limited information on the functioning of the service was gathered. In 2024, the AtMEP trial was expanded to include all centres delivering National Qualifications. The following subjects and levels were included:

- Geography: National 5 and Higher
- Graphic Communication: National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher
- Media: National 5
- Music: National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher
- Statistics: Advanced Higher (paper/component 1 and 2)

As in 2023, AtMEP remained a free service that centres accessed. However, this expanded trial saw more focus on learner rights and SQA guidance emphasised that centres must have explicit learner permission to access their marked exam papers and set parameters around access to and use of the marked exam papers.

It should be noted that the 2024 extended trial operated in a slightly different legislative context to the 2023 pilot, with the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots law from 16 July 2024. The Act requires demonstration of due consideration to how decisions made will impact on children's rights.

Evaluation

The evaluation of the 2024 AtMEP trial was designed to enable further development of the service and evidence-based policy development.

Practitioners

A large-scale survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data was distributed to centres via SQA co-ordinators and via SQA's Co-ordinator Update and SQA News. The survey link was also available on the relevant pages of SQA's website. The survey gathered perceptions and experiences of those who interacted with the AtMEP service, including SQA co-ordinators and subject teachers. It also gathered the views of those who had not interacted with the service but who had views on how they would like any future service to function. There were 390 substantive practitioner survey responses.

Nine in-depth follow-up interviews to explore the issues took place with practitioners who had volunteered for interview through the survey.

Learners

A large-scale survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data was distributed via SQA co-ordinators, SQA liaison managers, and SQA News to learners who interacted with the AtMEP service on their experiences and perceptions. The survey link was also promoted via social media and was available on the relevant pages of SQA's website. There were 146 substantive learner survey responses.

SQA staff and appointees

Interviews with senior appointees explored their perceptions of any potential impact on marking teams, teaching and learning, and assessment standards, plus suggestions for improvements. Six interviews were conducted, covering all the AtMEP subject areas.

Interviews with Qualification Development (QD) staff in the relevant subject teams collected feedback received from appointees or centres on the trial and how AtMEP impacted on QD teams' own work, plus suggestions for improvements. Five of the six AtMEP QMs were interviewed.

A focus group with nine liaison managers explored the feedback that they had received from centres and local authorities on the trial and gathered suggestions for improvements.

Data analysis

The AtMEP trial collected data on downloaded marked exam papers, including centre, candidate name and Scottish Candidate Number (SCN), candidate date of birth, subject, level, and component. This data was matched with SQA statistical data and analysed to explore use of the service.

Appeals rates and appeals success rates in subjects involved in the trial were also compared between learners whose marked exam papers were downloaded and those whose marked exam papers were not downloaded.

Research methods and limitations

Respondents

As noted above, the practitioner and learner surveys were disseminated in a variety of ways, including through SQA News, SQA Co-ordinator Update, direct SQA co-ordinator email, via SQA liaison managers, and on social media. It is possible, with

any survey activity of this type, that those who chose to respond were motivated to do so by having particularly strong opinions that they wished to share with SQA.

It is also possible that those who chose to take part in this research, both surveys and interviews, may not be entirely representative, either of those who enter for National Qualifications as a whole or of those who used the AtMEP service this year.

Learners

Data on learner equalities characteristics was gathered with the objective of assessing whether the service impacted certain groups differently. The intention was to collate relevant evidence that is robust enough to demonstrate how consideration has been given to learner voice (for a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment) and the impact on learners from different equality groups (for an Equality Impact Assessment). Learner voice was central to the evaluation, particularly given the UNCRC requirement that children have a right to have their voices heard in matters concerning them.

There were only 146 substantive learner responses. These response numbers, therefore, do not allow for robust analysis to understand if learners with different equalities characteristics experienced the AtMEP service differently.

Practitioners

We analysed survey responses to see if views differed among various groups of practitioner respondents. These different groups of practitioner respondents were:

- those who had been an SQA appointee in the past five years
- those who had been a marker for an AtMEP subject this year
- those who had engaged with the trial this year
- those who are SQA co-ordinators

Questions were answered on five-point Likert scales, which were converted to numerical values from 1 to 5 for analysis. When mean scores for different groups appeared substantially different, we used a t-test (a test of statistical significance

between two groups) to check if these differences were statistically significant. A p-value of less than 0.05 was used to determine significance.

We did not see any significantly different views between those who had been a marker for an AtMEP subject this year and those who had not, nor between those who engaged with the AtMEP trial this year and those who did not. There was one question where views of those who had been an SQA appointee in the past five years differed from the views of those who had not been an SQA appointee, and four questions where views of SQA co-ordinators differed from non-SQA co-ordinators.

These significant differences are visualised in charts in the analysis below.

Qualitative analysis

Qualitative data collection provides a much greater level of detail than can be gained from quantitative survey questions, and the use of interviews allows for a dialogue to help us fully understand stakeholder views and experiences. Direct quotes from qualitative survey questions or interviews in this report are given in italics.

A number of qualitative questions were included in the learner and practitioner surveys. These asked participants to, for instance, give examples of particular issues they faced, or to expand on their answers using numerical scales. This allowed us to develop a greater depth of understanding of the views of learners and practitioners.

To build on this qualitative data, and to go into more depth on views on AtMEP, we interviewed a range of practitioners, senior appointees and QMs. The interviews followed a semi-structured approach which aimed to allow respondents to freely share their experiences and views without too much direction, while still allowing the interviews to focus consistently on important aspects of the AtMEP trial.

These qualitative interviews were intended to illustrate a range of perspectives and were not intended to be fully representative of the wider population. Interviews were recorded and non-verbatim transcribed. Depending on the nature of the discussion, interviews did not always follow the strict order of the questions, and some answers were given in different places. Interviewers still sought to ensure that all questions were covered in every interview. Questions were grouped into key topic areas.

Qualitative survey and interview data has been analysed using an inductive approach. Researchers analysed these qualitative answers by categorising responses and drawing out themes, producing codes that allowed analysis across responses. As with any other approach to analysing qualitative data, the results are contingent on how the coding is carried out. There are several factors to bear in mind.

Firstly, not all survey respondents chose to respond to open questions. We cannot therefore know that those who chose to respond are representative of the wider population. Secondly, most respondents focused on one or two main areas in their response. We have no way of knowing what they think about other topics. Thirdly, we cannot quantify the strength of respondents' views in the way that we would in a closed question. Lastly, we are reliant on the coding decisions made earlier in the analysis exercise.

As a result, most analysis of qualitative survey questions is discursive, and looks to summarise and discuss the reasons that respondents have provided. Generally, the most commonly cited reasons will be discussed first. Nonetheless, it is important that we are able to describe the proportion of respondents who share similar views. Therefore, in qualitative analysis, the framework below is used.

Table 1: Qualitative analysis framework

Descriptor	Meaning
Unanimous or almost all	All or almost all participants gave the same answers
A vast majority	Nearly all participants, with some still having different views
Most	More than 75% of participants
A majority	More than 50% but fewer than 75%
Many	Nearly 50%
Some	More than 20%
Several	Less than 20%
Few	Less than 10%

Practitioner evaluation

Practitioner survey

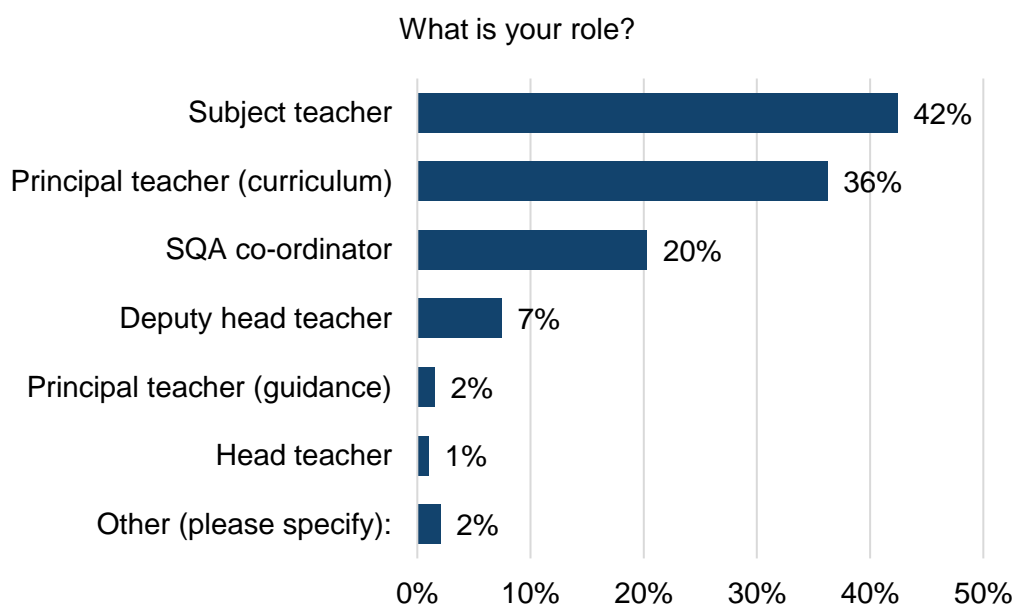
A large-scale survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data was distributed to practitioners. This was aimed at both those who interacted with the AtMEP service in 2024 and those who had not but who may have views on any future service.

There were 390 substantive responses to the survey, but it should be noted that not every respondent answered every question.

Respondent profiles

Respondents were asked about their role (they could choose more than one option). 42% of respondents were a subject teacher, 36% were a principal teacher (curriculum), 20% an SQA co-ordinator, 7% a deputy head, 2% a principal teacher (guidance), and 1% a head teacher. Of the 2% who chose 'other', most said they worked in learning support or were a student.

Figure 1: All practitioners — respondents' roles

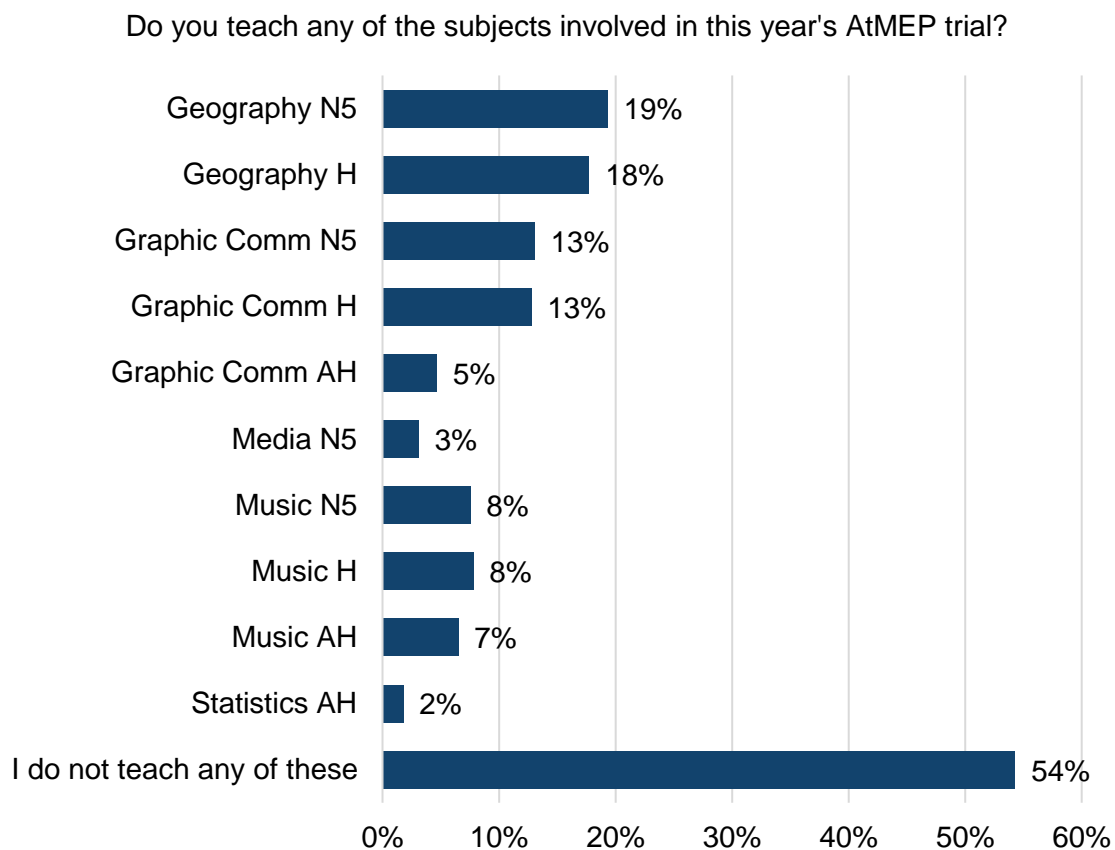


50% of respondents said that they had been an SQA appointee in the past five years and 30% said that they had been a marker for one of the subjects involved in the AtMEP trial this year.

Respondents were asked if they taught any of the subjects involved in the 2024 AtMEP trial. Again, they could choose more than one.

While 54% of respondents did not teach any of the subjects in the trial, 19% taught National 5 Geography, 18% Higher Geography, 13% National 5 Graphic Communication, 13% Higher Graphic Communication, 5% Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, 3% National 5 Media, 8% National 5 Music, 8% Higher Music, 7% Advanced Higher Music, and 2% Advanced Higher Statistics.

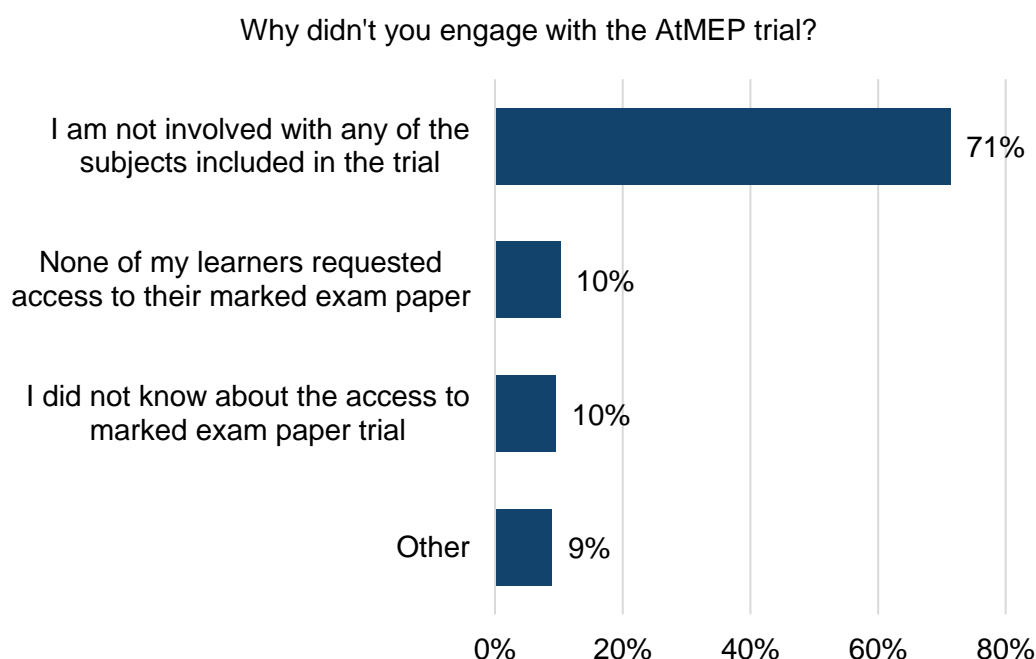
Figure 2: All practitioners — subject taught



While 60% of respondents said that they had engaged with the AtMEP trial, 40% had not.

Those who had not engaged were then asked why not. 71% said that they had not engaged because they are not involved with any of the subjects in the trial, 10% because none of their learners had requested access to their marked exam paper, 10% because they did not know about the trial, and 9% because of another reason.

Figure 3: Practitioners who did not engage — reasons for not engaging

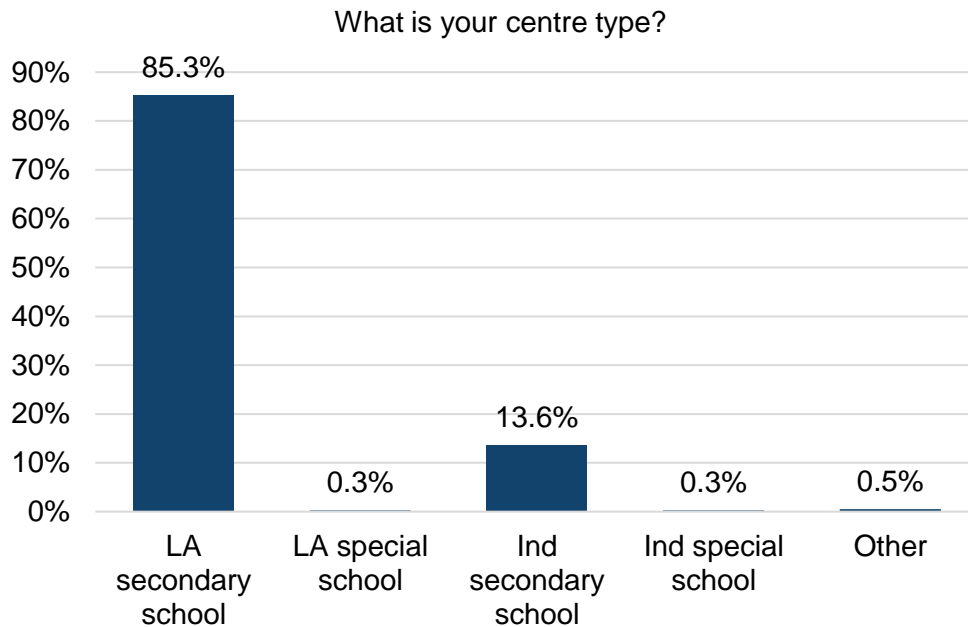


Thirteen of those who had chosen 'other' gave further comments on why they had not engaged. Four said that their school or local authority had made the decision not to take part in the trial due to workload concerns. Three said that they would have liked to have engaged with the trial but that none of their learners requested their marked exam paper. Two said that they did not have enough time to access marked exam papers, particularly at a busy time of year. Two questioned the value of accessing marked exam papers, with one commenting that marked performances or assignments would be more helpful. And of the remaining two, one was a newly qualified teacher and the other on secondment.

All respondents were then asked their centre type. 85% were from local authority secondary schools and 14% from independent secondary schools. Additionally, one respondent came from a local authority special school and one from an independent special school. Two respondents chose 'other' here, but comments suggested that,

for one, their centre would fit into the independent secondary school category and the other did not specify their centre type.

Figure 4: All practitioners — respondents' centre type



Respondents were asked if their school is based in an island community. Only six (1.6%) said yes.

As shown in the table below, respondents came from across all 32 local authority areas. The highest proportions were from Edinburgh (15%) and North Lanarkshire (12%).

Table 2: All practitioners — respondents' local authority area

Respondent local authority area	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents
Edinburgh	57	14.7%
North Lanarkshire	45	11.6%
Glasgow	27	7.0%
Highland	20	5.2%
West Lothian	19	4.9%
Fife	18	4.6%
Dumfries & Galloway	17	4.4%

Respondent local authority area	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents
South Ayrshire	16	4.1%
Aberdeenshire	15	3.9%
Dundee City	15	3.9%
South Lanarkshire	14	3.6%
Aberdeen City	13	3.4%
Scottish Borders	12	3.1%
Angus	11	2.8%
Renfrewshire	11	2.8%
Argyll & Bute	9	2.3%
East Dunbartonshire	9	2.3%
Inverclyde	9	2.3%
Moray	9	2.3%
Perth & Kinross	6	1.5%
Stirling	6	1.5%
Clackmannanshire	5	1.3%
East Renfrewshire	4	1.0%
North Ayrshire	4	1.0%
West Dunbartonshire	4	1.0%
East Lothian	3	0.8%
Midlothian	3	0.8%
East Ayrshire	2	0.5%
Eilean Siar	2	0.5%
Falkirk	1	0.3%
Orkney Islands	1	0.3%
Shetland Islands	1	0.3%

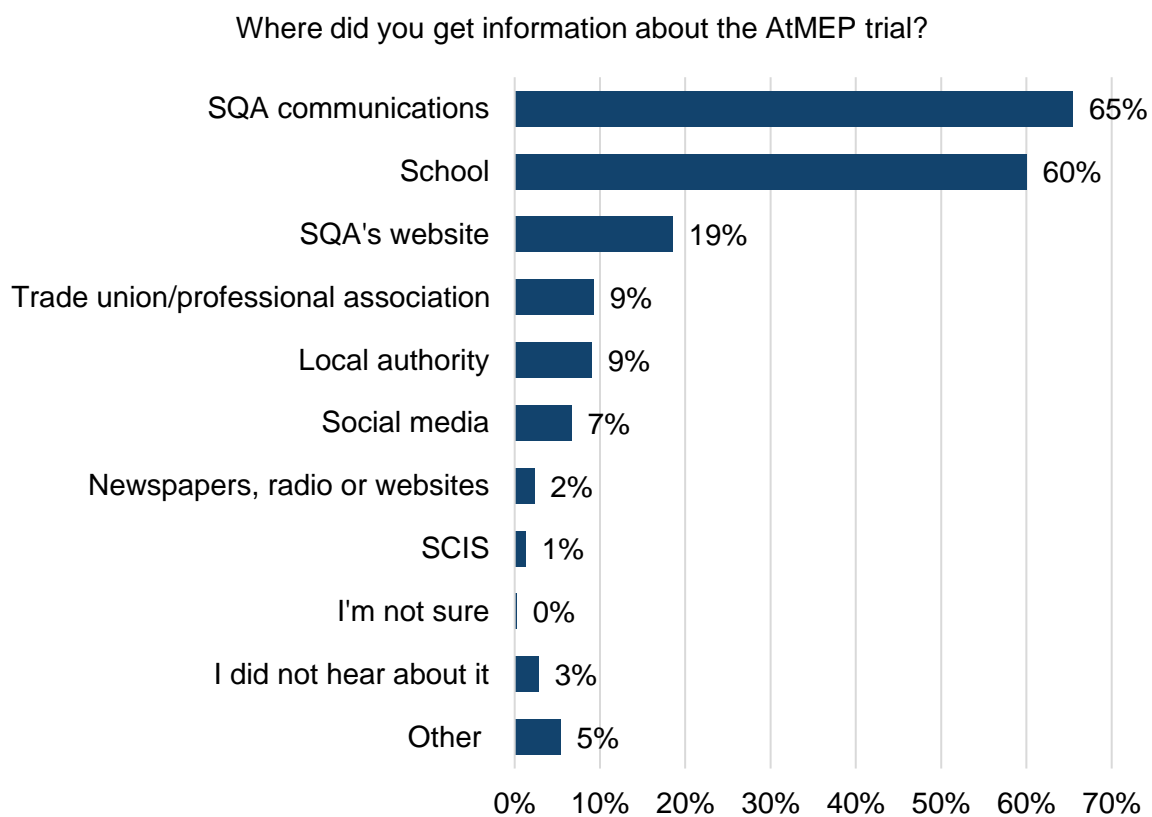
Communication and guidance

Respondents were asked where they had got information about the AtMEP trial (they could choose more than one option).

65% said SQA communications, 60% their schools, 19% the SQA website, 9% trade union or professional association, 9% their local authority, and 7% social media.

Smaller proportions said newspapers or other media (2%) or the Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) (1%). 3% of respondents said that they had not heard about the AtMEP trial and 5% chose 'other'.

Figure 5: All practitioners — sources of information about AtMEP

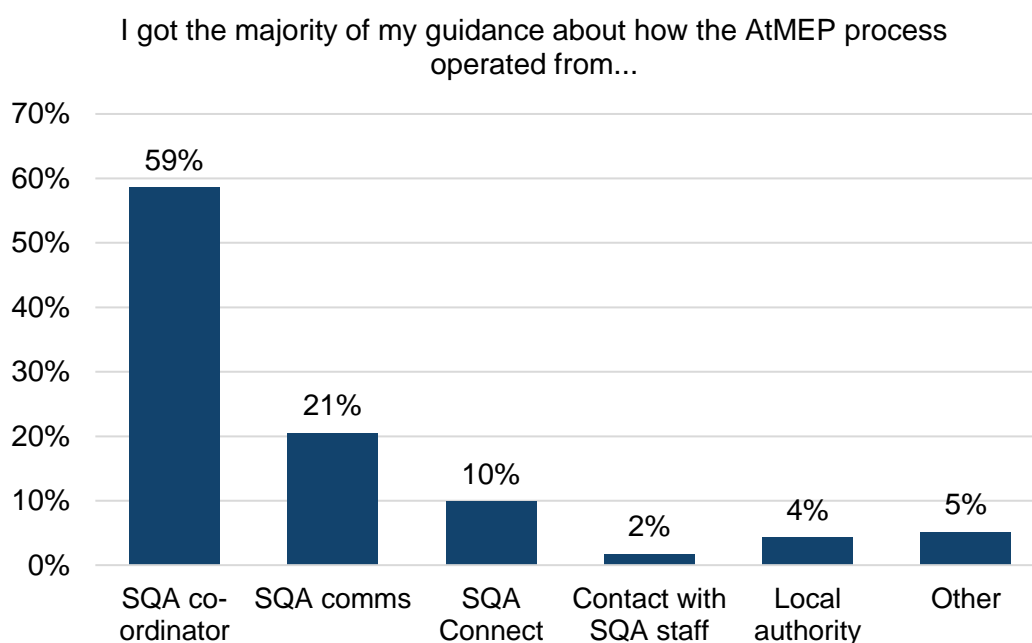


Of the 5% of respondents who chose 'other', five mentioned the Scottish Association of Geography Teachers and one the Edinburgh History Teachers' Association. Three respondents said that they had received information as an SQA appointee. Two said that they were informed by their SQA co-ordinator and another three through colleagues. The remaining comments would fit into the categories above, that is,

trade union or SQA communications. One respondent suggested that they had had to piece together information from various sources.

Those respondents who had engaged with the trial were then asked more specifically about where they got the majority of their guidance about how the AtMEP process operated. 59% said their SQA co-ordinator, 21% SQA communications, 10% SQA Connect, 4% their local authority, and 2% direct contact with SQA staff. 5% chose 'other'.

Figure 6: All practitioners — sources of information about the AtMEP process



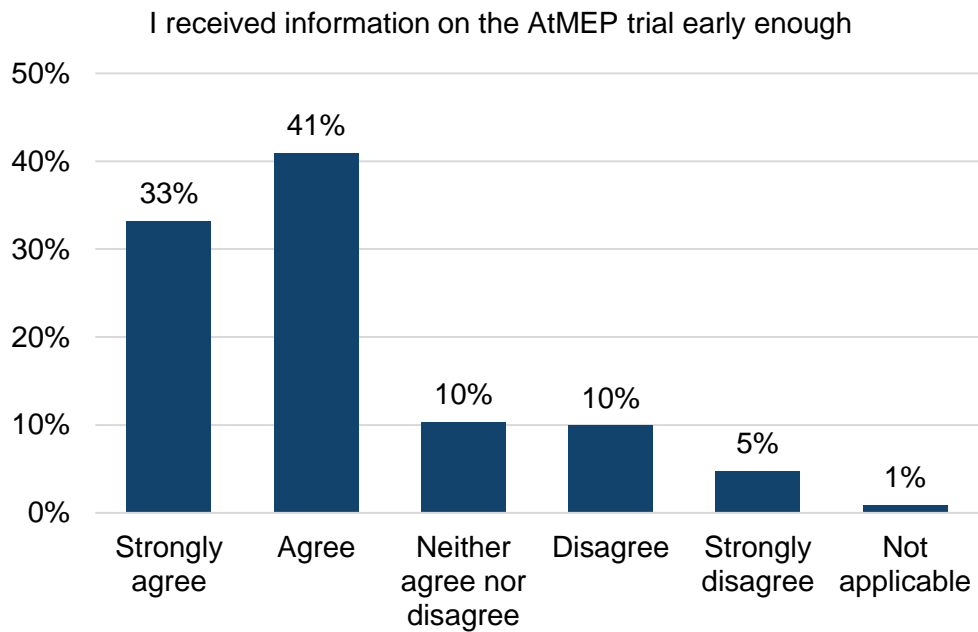
Twelve respondents who had chosen 'other' here left comments. Five of these mentioned a subject group or association. One respondent mentioned their head of department. Two respondents suggested that they did not have enough information and communications were poor. Remaining respondents mentioned sources of guidance that would fit into the categories above — their SQA co-ordinator or SQA liaison manager.

Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were then asked their level of agreement with a series of statements on communication and guidance.

33% of respondents strongly agreed that they had received information on the AtMEP trial early enough, 41% agreed, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, 10%

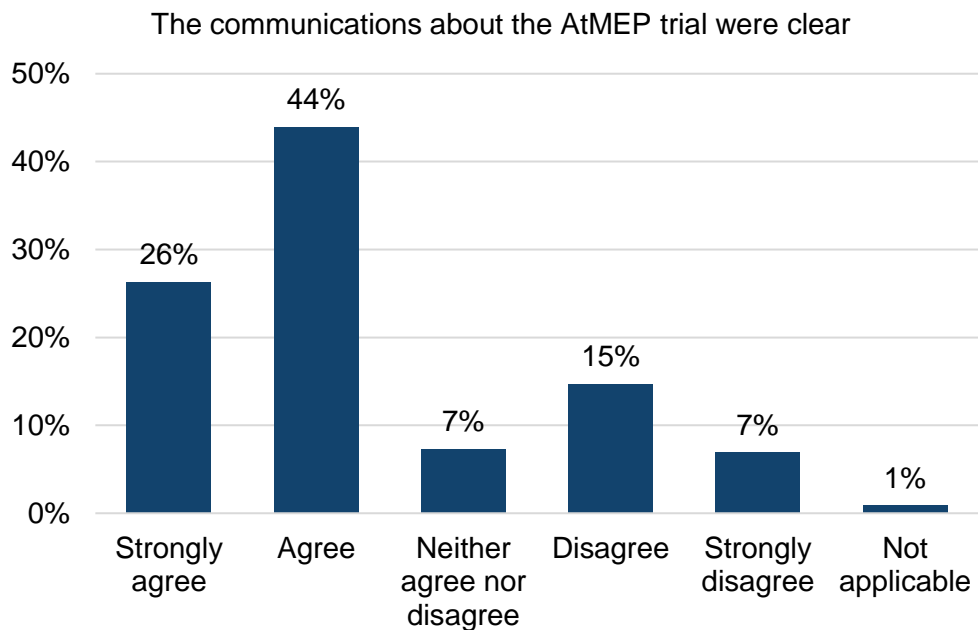
disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. The question was not applicable to 1%. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.9.

Figure 7: Practitioners who engaged — timing of information



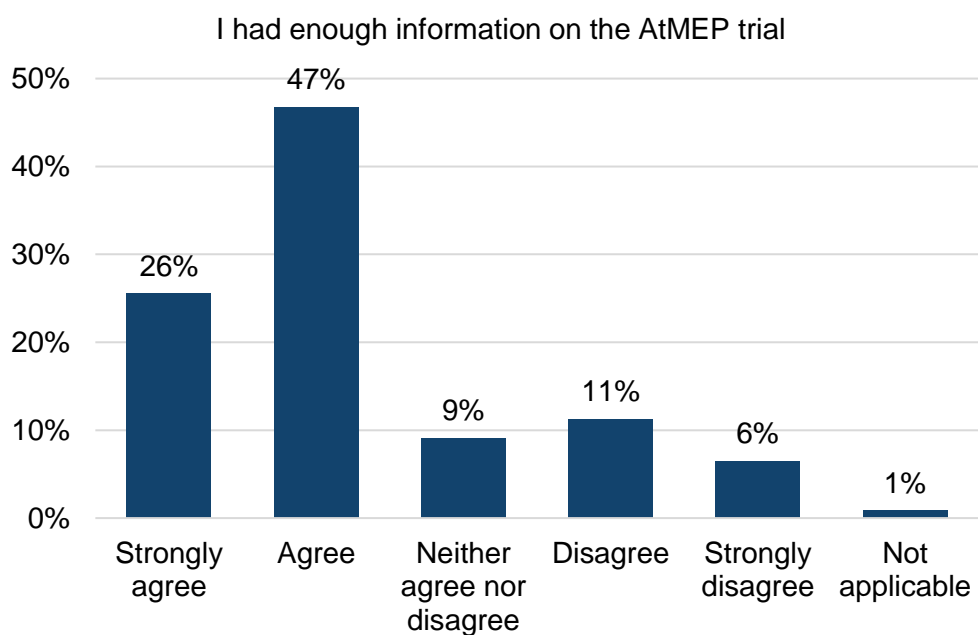
26% of respondents strongly agreed that the communications about the AtMEP trial were clear, 44% agreed, 7% neither agreed nor disagreed, 15% disagreed, and 7% strongly disagreed. The question was not applicable to 1%. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.7.

Figure 8: Practitioners who engaged — clarity of communications



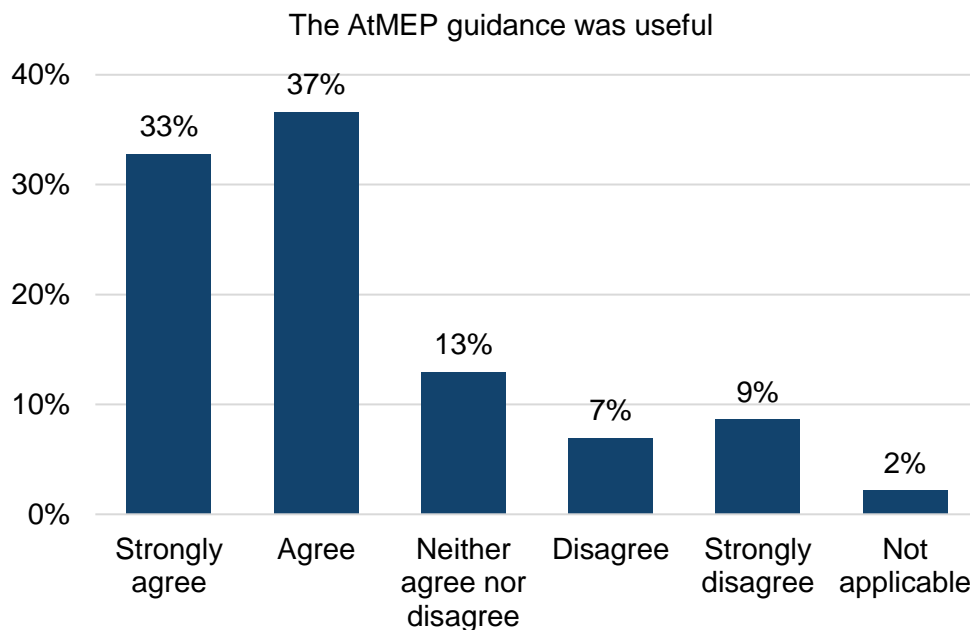
26% of respondents strongly agreed that they had enough information on the AtMEP trial, 47% agreed, 9% neither agreed nor disagreed, 11% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. The question was not applicable to 1%. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.7.

Figure 9: Practitioners who engaged — amount of information



33% of respondents strongly agreed that the AtMEP guidance was useful, 37% agreed, 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. The question was not applicable to 2%. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.8.

Figure 10: Practitioners who engaged — usefulness of guidance



Communication and guidance comments

Respondents who had engaged with the trial were asked if they had any comments relating to AtMEP communication and guidance. While 86 practitioners submitted comments, almost half of these did not relate to AtMEP communication and guidance.

The most prominent theme related to learner permissions. Some respondents suggested that the communications around this issue had not been clear, and practitioners had expected to be able to use marked exam papers for teaching and learning purposes.

It wasn't clear that we needed learner consent to access the papers.

It was frustrating that we had to gain pupil permission to access the scripts – I was unaware of this prior to the trial – I would have got pupils to sign a form prior to the exam to offer the school access to exam scripts.

Moreover, several respondents thought that the process of how they should get learner permission was unclear. Additionally, a couple of respondents said that it was unclear whether parents and carers could request marked exam papers.

Several respondents thought that communication and guidance about the AtMEP trial had come too late. While a small number thought that knowing about the trial before study leave would have facilitated centres getting early learner permission, as noted above, others just suggested that they would have liked more time to prepare.

A few respondents suggested that unclear guidance meant that practice across the country was not consistent.

From social media ... the consensus was that schools across Scotland had different procedures as to how to access the papers.

There seemed to [be] discrepancies between what SQA said centres can do and what they actually did. Some local authorities let departments have full access to the marked papers – my centre only let me have access to one paper due to a pupil putting in an appeal.

A few respondents also raised the issue of marking instructions. While a couple said that the marking instructions had been difficult to locate, others clearly did not locate them, as they talked about the marking instructions not being available at the same time as marked exam papers.

Nonetheless, a few respondents commented here that the communication and guidance were explanatory and useful.

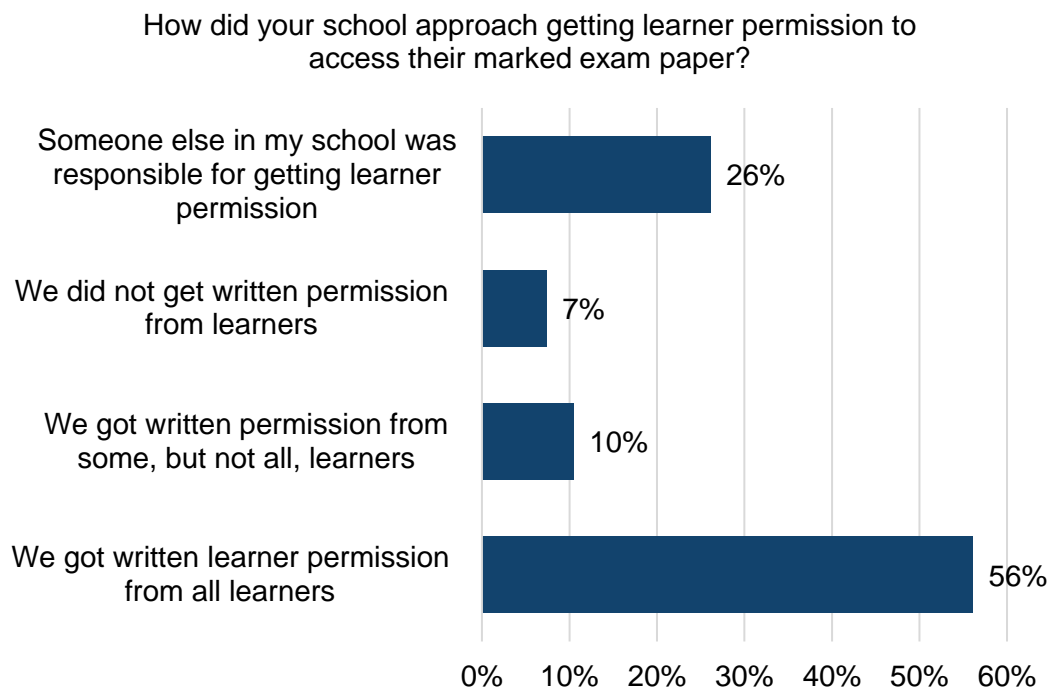
Other issues raised here, unrelated to communication and guidance, included:

- Several respondents praised the usefulness of the AtMEP service in general.
- Several suggested that marked assignments should be made available.
- Several criticised the service, particularly in terms of workload.
- A few cited perceived issues with marking.

Learner permissions

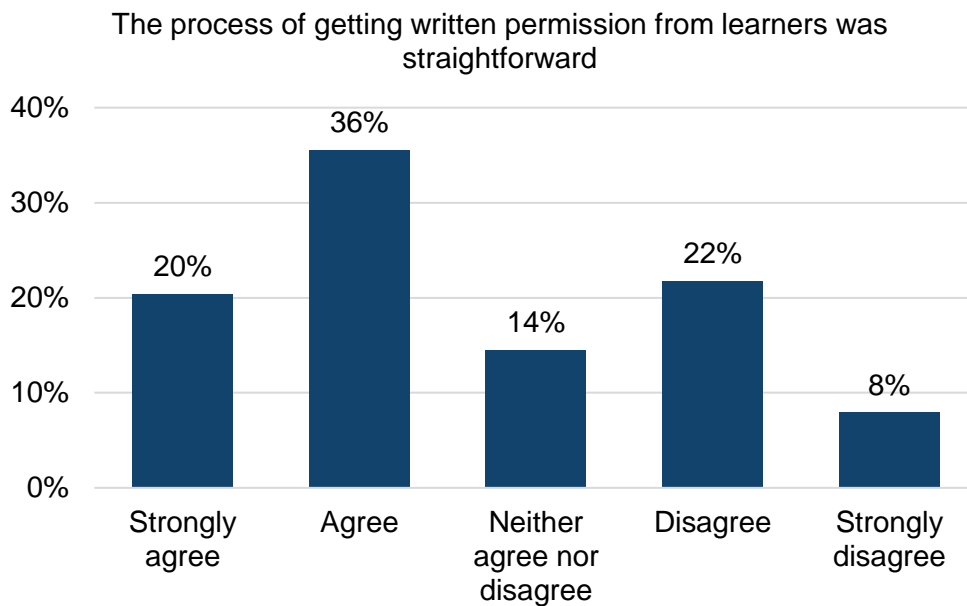
Respondents who had engaged with the trial were asked how they approached getting learner permission to access marked exam papers. 56% of respondents said that they got written permission from all learners who accessed their marked exam paper, 10% got written permission from some but not all learners who accessed their marked exam paper, and 7% did not get written permission. 26% of respondents said that someone else in their school had been responsible for getting learner permission.

Figure 11: Practitioners who engaged — approaches to learner permission



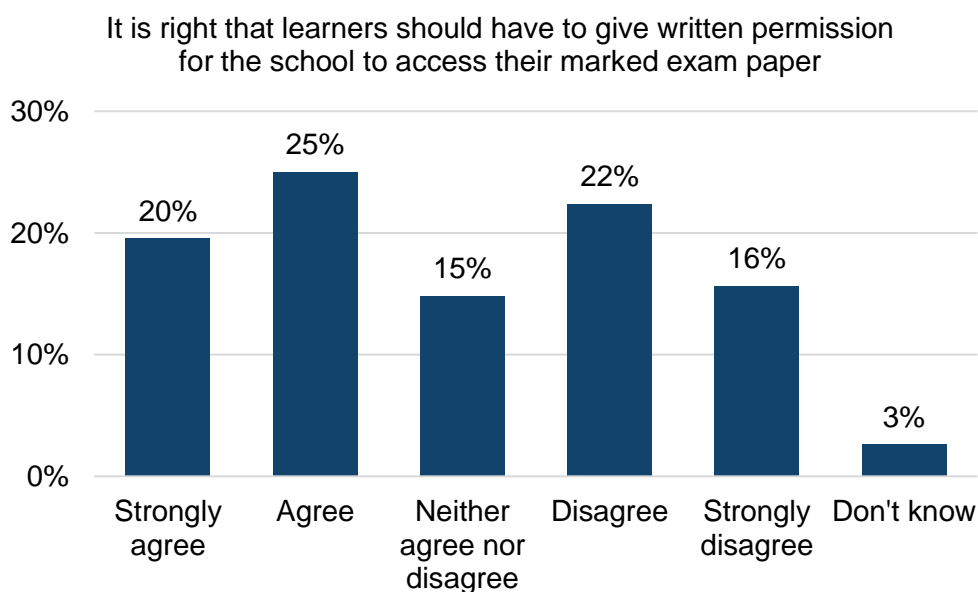
Those respondents who had said that they got written permission from some or all learners were then asked the extent to which they agreed that this was straightforward. 20% of respondents strongly agreed that the process was straightforward, 36% agreed, 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, 22% disagreed, and 8% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.4.

Figure 12: Practitioners who engaged — straightforwardness of getting written permission



All respondents were then asked the extent to which they agreed that it is right that learners should have to give their written permission for the school to access their marked exam paper. 20% strongly agreed, 25% agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, 22% disagreed, and 16% strongly disagreed. 3% said that they did not know. Excluding 'don't know', the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.1.

Figure 13: Practitioners who engaged — written learner permission



Learner permissions comments

All respondents were asked if they had any comments on the issue of learner permissions; 150 left substantive comments.

Several respondents stated their support for a learner permission model, suggesting that it was right that the learner should decide who sees their marked exam paper.

No one other than those involved with the marking process should see the paper without the permission of the owner.

However, in terms of those respondents who left comments, this was a minority view. Generally, those who submitted comments here were not supportive of the learner permission model that was in place in 2024.

Many respondents argued that learner permission should not be required. Overall, this was the most prominent theme. Some suggested that requiring learner permission limits the usefulness, or the potential usefulness, of AtMEP. Respondents felt that there was a lack of learner engagement or interest in the service, but that practitioners would still have appreciated and benefitted from seeing marked exam papers for teaching and learning or CPD purposes.

Seeing marked papers is far more useful to practitioners than it is to learners.

I think the centres will hugely benefit from seeing where marks are awarded. It will help in their understanding of standards. Therefore, I don't think the centres need the candidates' permission to view the scripts.

If this work is being used to improve teacher practice, and not to be shared widely, then it would be understandable if teachers can access their papers without permission.

To that end, some respondents suggested that marked exam papers should be released to centres without learner permission, even if that is anonymously.

Other respondents questioned why learner permission was required at all, particularly given the other information and data about learners that they handle.

It is not needed at any other point in accessing marked work or assessments within the school year, so should not require it at this point.

I don't think this is a GDPR issue - I am unclear about why we need permission to look at a paper.

*Can the data not be processed under the public task criterion of GDPR?
Teachers should be able to access the papers to learn about SQA marking, improve courses, and prepare students for future examination.*

Some respondents specifically mentioned the workload associated with gathering written learner permission. This was deemed to be time consuming, especially for SQA co-ordinators, and respondents suggested that it placed an administrative burden on centres at an already busy time of year. A number of comments suggested that this workload may be unmanageable if AtMEP were to be scaled up.

Requiring individual permission in August is absurd and impractical.

My biggest concern is again the increased workload on the centre and in particular SQA coordinator if this service is to be expanded.

One respondent thought that verbal permission should suffice and, indeed, a few respondents stated they had only received verbal permission from learners this year.

Related to the issue of workload and AtMEP administration, it was clear that many centres did not wait for learners to contact them about accessing their marked exam paper but had proactively sought learner permission to download. This led on to comments from several respondents that it was challenging to contact learners for permission, particularly those who had left school.

To remove the administration associated with ensuring learner permission, several practitioners thought that AtMEP should be a learner direct service, where learners contact SQA, possibly through MySQA, to access their marked exam papers.

Learners should be accessing their scripts via SQA and not their school.

A few suggested an opt-out learner permission model, where learner permission is assumed (and assumed for the centre) unless learners specifically state otherwise. A

couple of respondents thought that a permission statement on the front sheet of their exam papers along with their SCN and other information could allow learners to opt in or out.

Perhaps an opt out system would work well. The general feeling in my class was that they did not mind the school having access to papers but were not motivated in themselves to see them, hence the lack of permission given.

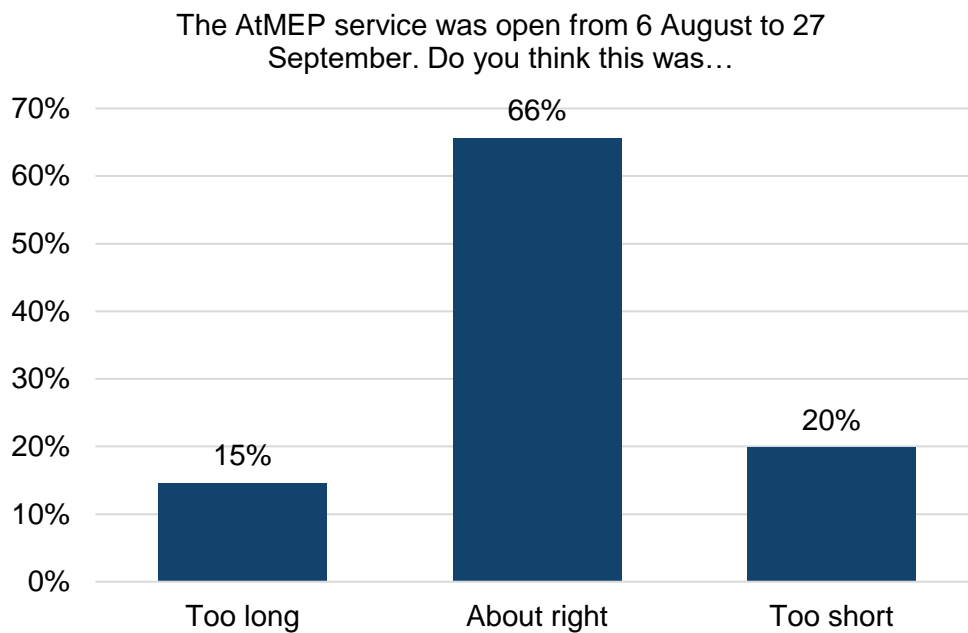
Likewise, a few respondents stated that it would be easier to get learner permission earlier; suggestions included prior to the summer holidays, before study leave, or at the beginning of the school year.

Finally, a few respondents called for clearer guidance on learner permissions and how marked exam papers can be used. This included whether and how learners could share their own marked exam papers. There was concern from a small number that there were discrepancies or a lack of consistency in marked exam paper permissions and usage across the country due to a perceived lack of clear SQA guidance. While one respondent praised the SQA template they had received in the guidance, another couple had clearly not seen this and requested one.

Timing

All respondents were asked about the length of time that the AtMEP service was open for. While 66% thought it was about right, 15% thought it was too long, and 20% thought it was too short.

Figure 14: All practitioners — timing of service



Timing comments

Respondents were asked if they had any comments about the timing of the service; 109 practitioners left comments. Of the respondents who left comments about the timing, around 1 in 10 indicated that there were no problems with the timing of the service. The majority of comments (6 in 10) were about at least one of the following:

- the length of time the service should be open
- the timing of the service as related to the return to schools
- the timing of the service as related to the appeals process

In terms of comments around the length of time that the service should be open, this varied amongst practitioners. The majority of these respondents commented that the service should be open for longer. Some respondents thought that the service should be open for only a month or so longer, while other practitioners thought that the service should be open indefinitely.

I don't understand why there is a closing date at all.

Access should be at the start of the next session until October holidays. Lack of teaching staff for subjects has massively increased the workload on existing subject and Principal Teachers.

If [it is] to be used as a learning tool, access to papers would be helpful for longer.

Other respondents commented that the timing of the service was inconvenient for accessing marked exam papers from learners who have left school, suggesting that the service should be open longer or should open earlier to allow contacting of S6s before they leave school.

Some pupils who were in S6 were difficult to communicate with given they had left the school. Opening the access to marked scripts before the previous year ended would allow more access to S6 pupils to gain their permission.

On the other hand, some respondents wanted the service to be shorter. One practitioner said that if the service is to help make informed decisions about appeals, then the service does not need to be any longer than the appeals service. A couple of respondents also said that the service would be better if it were open 24 hours or less but did not give any reasons why.

About 1 in 10 respondents who left comments mentioned the timing of the appeals or marking processes. Most of these respondents said that as it stands the service was not useful after the appeals process closes, and that the timing of the service should either be long enough to allow the service to be beneficial in other areas, or that the service should close once appeals are over. One practitioner, however, said that the service should not overlap with the appeals process at all, due to workload reasons.

The access shouldn't overlap the appeals process. From an administrative perspective, it was a lot to manage as exams officer.

Of the respondents who left comments about the timing of the service as it related to the start of the school year, about half of these commented about the workloads associated with that time of year.

Given how busy teachers are, this timeframe is very short to give us time to look through scripts, sort appeals etc on top of normal teaching responsibilities.

Other comments about the timing of the service relating to the start of the school year were about issues with the service starting while some schools were still on holiday. Some respondents emphasised that not all schools start at the same time and suggested that starting the service during summer holidays gives the impression that staff should be working at this time.

Consideration should be given to schools still being on holiday. Access this early puts an expectation on staff (particularly SQA co-ordinators) to work unpaid hours on top of the many already worked.

The remainder of the comments were a mixture of:

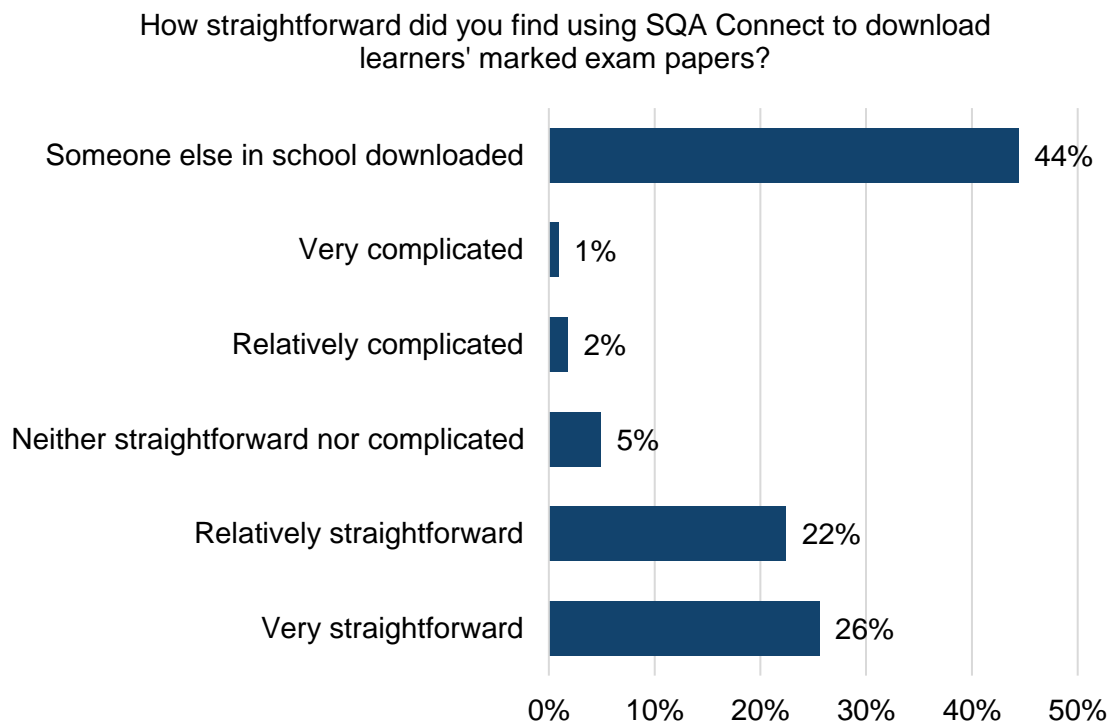
- a lack of awareness of the timeframe from learners and schools
- the relationship between timing and the possibility of wider access, where some practitioners thought that a widened service would involve different timing considerations
- a dissatisfaction about the service in general
- solutions for decreasing the time it takes to run the service, namely creating an opt-in or opt-out system or that SQA manage the system

SQA Connect

Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP service were asked how straightforward it was using SQA Connect to download learners' marked exam papers.

44% of respondents said that someone else in the school had been responsible for downloading marked exam papers, but 26% thought it was very straightforward, 22% relatively straightforward, 5% neither straightforward nor complicated, 2% relatively complicated, and 1% very complicated. Excluding responses where someone else in school had downloaded the marked exam papers, the mean score for this question, where very straightforward = 5 and very complicated = 1, was 4.3.

Figure 15: Practitioners who engaged — using SQA Connect



SQA Connect comments

Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP service were asked if they had any comments about using SQA Connect to download learners' marked exam papers. There were 52 substantive responses.

The main theme, from around a third of those who commented, was that the process had been time consuming.

Too time consuming for schools to undertake.

Indeed, most of the other issues raised by respondents indirectly linked to how time consuming they thought the process was, even if they did not frame these issues in those terms.

For instance, a few respondents each mentioned:

- Centres need more SQA Connect logins so that subject teachers can download marked exam papers, and it is not solely the responsibility of SQA co-ordinators.

- Centres should be able to bulk download multiple marked exam papers at the same time.
- The file names should contain the learner's name, not just their SCN.
- AtMEP should be a learner direct service.
- Centres should not have to mark a permission box for each download.
- Separate components should not have to be downloaded separately.
- Accessing marked exam papers caused a workload issue.

One respondent each mentioned: the marking instructions were difficult to locate, printing marked exam papers had been challenging, and clearer guidance was required on permitted usage.

However, some respondents commented that the SQA Connect process had been straightforward.

The system was straightforward and easy to use.

Learners with additional support needs (ASN)

When asked if they had any learners who have ASN ask to access their marked exam paper, 34% of respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP service said yes, 43% said no, and 23% did not know.

These respondents were also asked if the software used by learners who use a screen reader was able to read out the information on their marked exam paper. The question was not applicable to 81% but 3% (7 respondents) said yes and 16% (35 respondents) said no.

Respondents who had engaged with the trial were asked if learners with ASN encountered any barriers when accessing their marked exam papers. Forty-six practitioners commented, but most just said that they did not. Some practitioners said that they did not know. Only two respondents said yes and detailed how these barriers were mitigated.

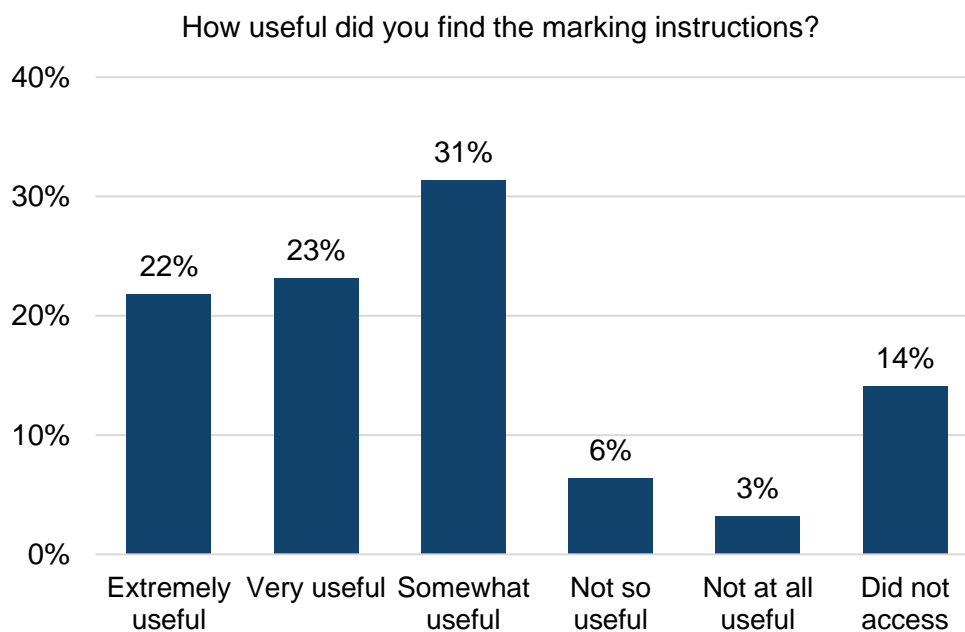
Learners with additional support needs were able to discuss their marked exam papers with their class teacher through scheduled drop-in sessions.

Yes, but this was facilitated through a meeting with the SQA co-ordinator, learner and class teacher that circumvented those barriers ... This method would not be viable for schools with a much higher volume of learners requesting access.

Marking instructions

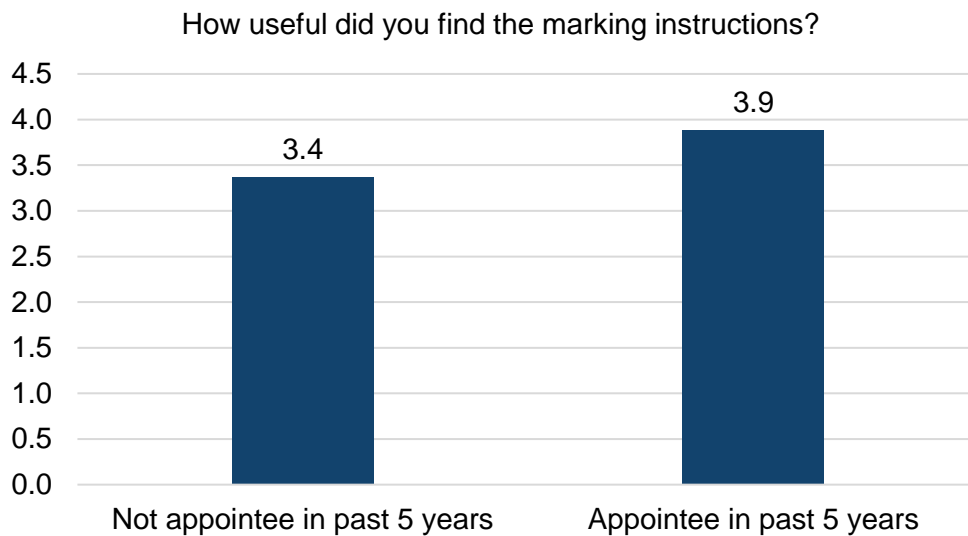
Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP service were asked how useful they thought the marking instructions had been. 14% had not accessed the marking instructions, but 22% thought they were extremely useful, 23% very useful, 31% somewhat useful, 6% not so useful, and 3% not at all useful. Excluding responses where they had not accessed the marking instructions, the mean score for this question, where extremely useful = 5 and not at all useful = 1, was 3.6.

Figure 16: Practitioners who engaged — usefulness of marking instructions



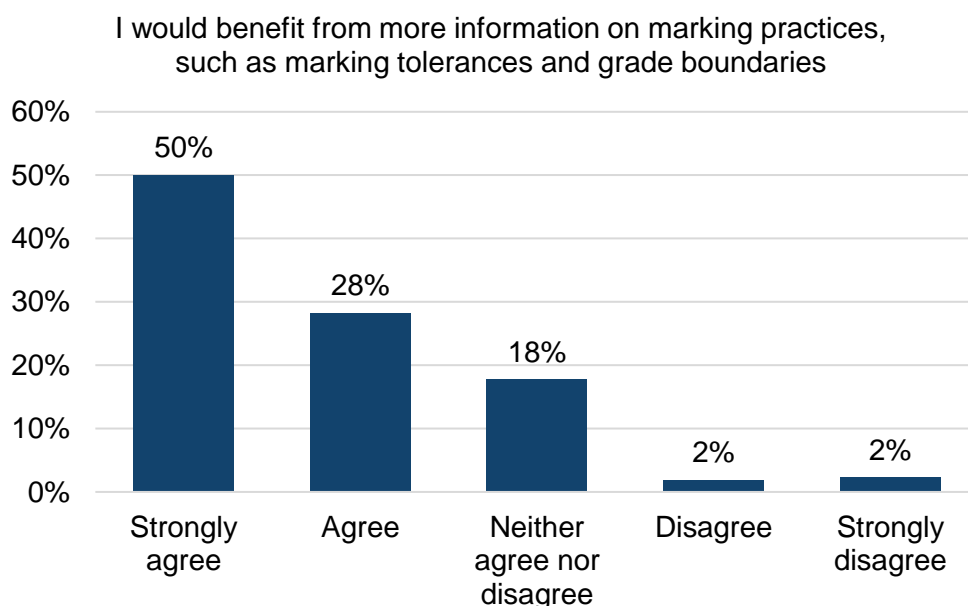
Those who had not been SQA appointees in the past five years found the marking instructions less useful on average compared to those who had been SQA appointees (scores of 3.4 and 3.9, respectively), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(187)=3.42$, $p=0.0008$).

Figure 17: Mean scores on usefulness of marking instructions for those who have been SQA appointees in the past five years and those who have not



Respondents who had engaged with the trial were then asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement ‘I would benefit from more information on marking practices, such as marking tolerances and grade boundaries’. 50% strongly agreed, 28% agreed, 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, 2% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.2.

Figure 18: Practitioners who engaged — views on more marking practices information



Marking instructions and practices comments

Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were asked if they had any comments on the marking instructions and/or more information that they would like on marking practices; 75 practitioners commented.

Some respondents said that more information on marking practices would be useful. While some of these respondents called for further information on grade boundaries and marking tolerances, others suggested that practitioners should be provided with the same material given to markers or a record of decisions taken at markers' meetings. These respondents thought that this would be both useful to practitioners and would demonstrate SQA's commitment to transparency.

The marking instructions were useful, but more information could be provided in terms of grade boundaries and tolerances.

Full MIs need to be provided along with any supplementary information given to markers to allow staff to fully understand the marking. Some element of explanation of marking processes in a learner friendly format would be useful to accompany marked exam papers.

Sometimes decisions are made at markers' briefings that are not fully publicised on final marking instructions. It would be good to have all decisions fully recorded and distributed to all.

On the other hand, a few respondents suggested that more information was not required. While some of these respondents were appointees, others just thought that the marking instructions and course reports are sufficient.

Several respondents expressed some frustration that marking instructions are sometimes not clear or detailed enough. There was also concern that these can change over time without practitioners being informed.

There are things in the marking scheme that aren't always fully explained/justified.

It is not always clear [in marking instructions] the level of detail required ... and this can change year on year.

It was also frustrating as a teacher to find that marking instructions had changed from previous years with no prior warning given to centres.

Some respondents highlighted what they perceived as marking issues and detailed where they felt marks had not been awarded where they should have been. One respondent suggested that being able to pinpoint this had been useful in terms of a learner deciding to appeal.

Staff have concerns about the quality of the marking having reviewed the papers.

There were clear and obvious errors in the marking of a student's written paper.

Relatedly, several respondents reported what they perceived as inconsistencies in marking highlighted by AtMEP.

Some pupils were given marks whilst others were not.

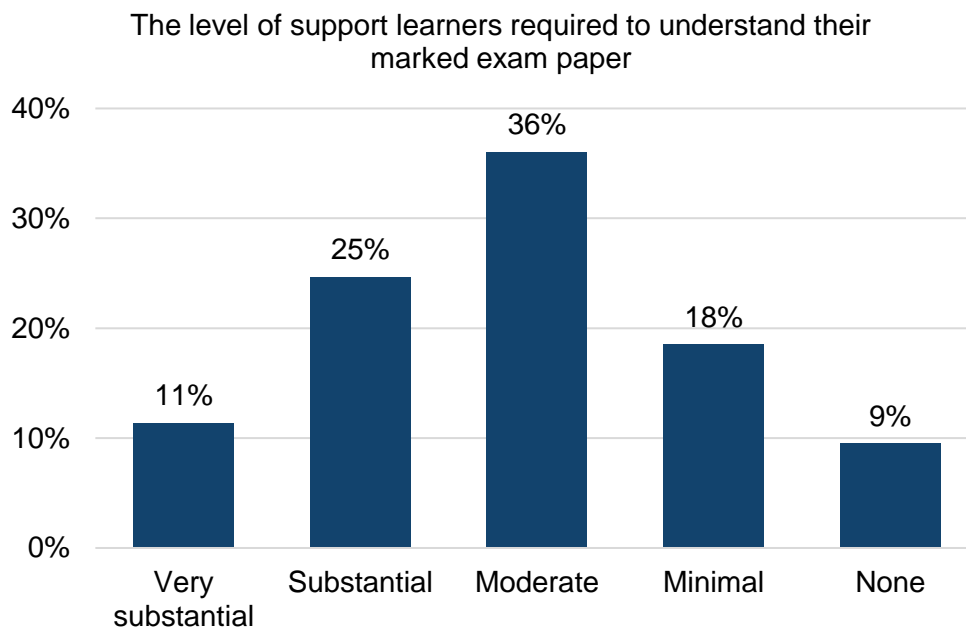
On the other hand, one respondent who is also a marker suggested that the AtMEP service had made them feel as though the professionalism of their marking was being questioned.

Finally, a couple of respondents suggested that annotations or feedback on marked exam papers should be clearer.

Workload

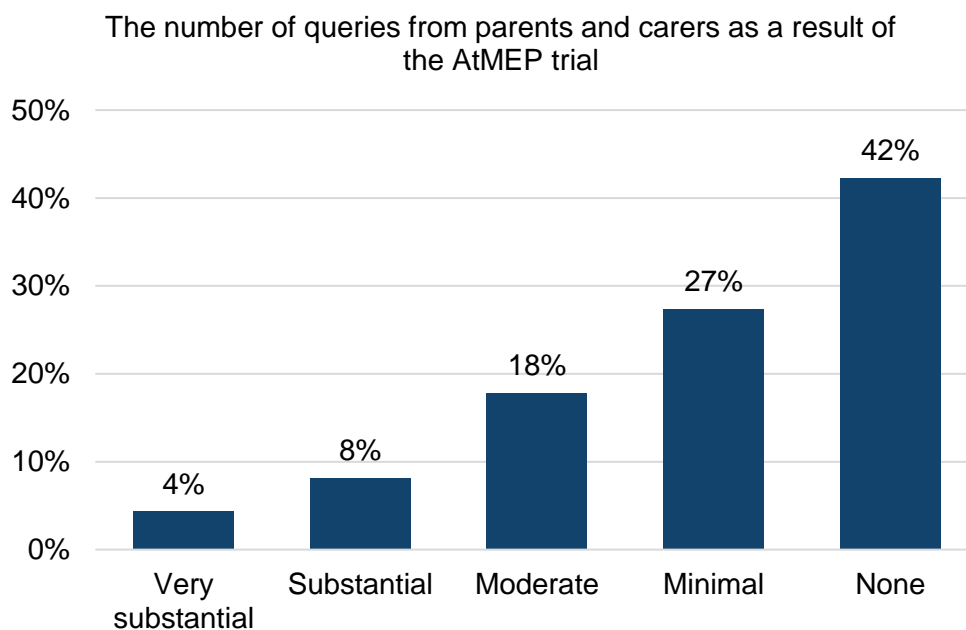
Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were asked how substantial the level of support learners required to understand their marked exam paper had been. 11% said very substantial, 25% substantial, 36% moderate, 18% minimal, and 9% none. The mean score for this question, where very substantial = 5 and none = 1, was 3.1.

Figure 19: Practitioners who engaged — learner support



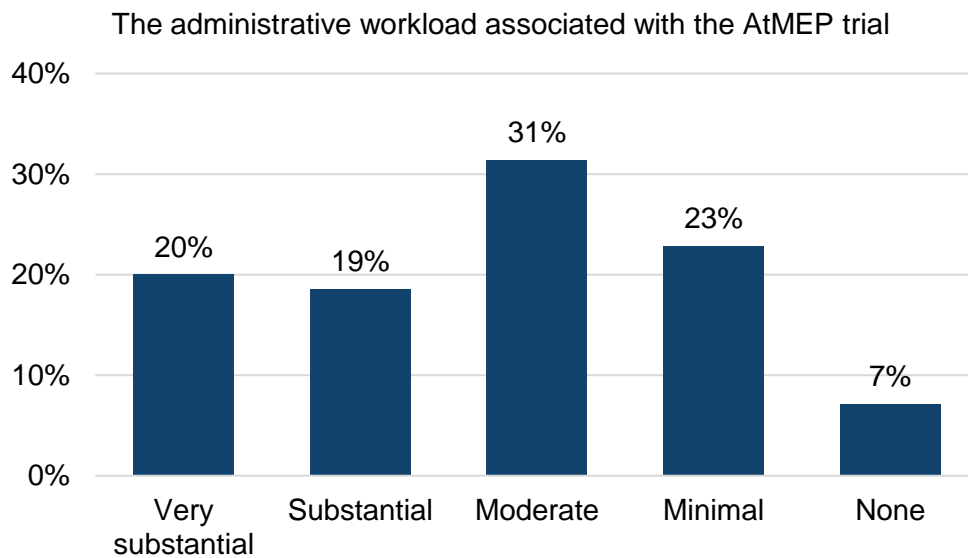
These respondents were also asked how substantial the number of queries from parents and carers as a result of the AtMEP trial had been. 4% said very substantial, 8% substantial, 18% moderate, 27% minimal, and 42% none. The mean score for this question, where very substantial = 5 and none = 1, was 2.0.

Figure 20: Practitioners who engaged — queries from parents and carers



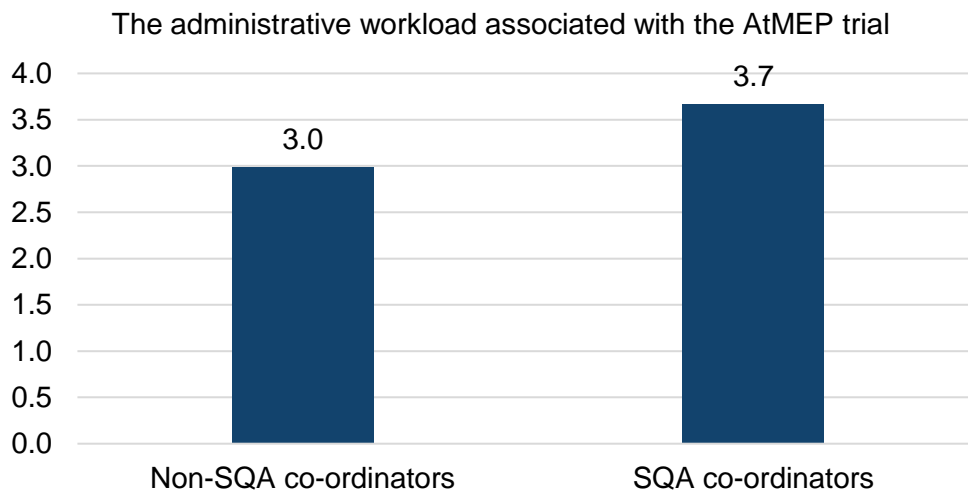
These respondents were then asked how substantial the administrative workload associated with the AtMEP trial had been. 20% said very substantial, 19% substantial, 31% moderate, 23% minimal, and 7% none. The mean score for this question, where very substantial = 5 and none = 1, was 3.2.

Figure 21: Practitioners who engaged — administrative workload



Respondents who were not SQA co-ordinators found the administrative workload associated with AtMEP less substantial compared to those who were SQA co-ordinators (scores of 3.0 and 3.7, respectively), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(208)=4.04, p<0.0001$).

Figure 22: Mean scores on administrative workload for those who are SQA co-ordinators and those who are not



Workload comments

Those practitioners who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were asked if they had any comments on the workload associated with it. Eighty-three respondents left substantive comments.

The main theme from these comments was concern around AtMEP being extended to more, and higher uptake, subjects. Some respondents suggested that the workload had been manageable this year only because there were relatively few downloads. They expressed strong feelings that AtMEP being scaled up would incur considerably more work.

During the trial process this was manageable, but I am concerned that if this is extended to the full exam diet then the workload for schools will be unmanageable.

It is not scalable or manageable in a centre like ours which has thousands of entries.

However, even with relatively low numbers of downloads and a limited number of subjects, some respondents nevertheless commented that the AtMEP process had been onerous and time consuming. The administration of the service was deemed burdensome, particularly by SQA co-ordinators who were responsible for downloading marked exam papers.

It took me an average of 20-25 minutes per pupil from their initial request/explaining the procedure/getting written permission/downloading and printing the papers/setting them up with a suitable time to view the papers - not to mention the time taken actually finding the relevant pupils in classes.

Keeping track of who has requested what and what's been downloaded and emailed/shared with the learner so all requests are fulfilled is a huge management.

Several respondents also mentioned the workload associated with engaging in learner discussions about their marked exam paper. While some of these

respondents remarked simply on the time that this took up, others expressed frustration that they were asked to explain judgements that were not theirs.

Whilst not a must, learners did expect me to mark their papers and provide feedback in relation to their grade.

Trying to explain some of the marking decisions was a huge workload.

Pupils did still ask for teachers to analyse their answers and provide judgement on the marks, despite explanation that this is not what the service is for.

Related to this, a small number of respondents commented on what they perceived as poor or incorrect marking.

A learner direct, rather than centre mediated, service was mentioned by several respondents as a way to mitigate the workload associated with AtMEP. These practitioners thought that a learner portal or MySQA should provide learners with access to their marked exam paper, removing centres from this process. Related to this, several respondents suggested that securing learner permission had added to centre workload. In many cases, it seems that centres proactively attempted to contact learners for their written permission rather than wait for learners to contact them to access their marked exam paper.

Contacting pupils to get their written permission was the most challenging.

One respondent thought that permission should be sought before the summer break, and another thought that learner permission should not be required.

Teachers ... are professional and already deal with a plethora of assessment and confidential information, they should absolutely not require permission from the learner.

A few respondents mentioned the workload caused by queries from parents and carers. Additionally, a small number highlighted the potential for conflict with parents and carers as a result of the AtMEP service. A few also noted that the timing of the

AtMEP service meant that centre staff were required to work in the school holidays and at a time centres are busy with appeals.

Finally, a few respondents suggested that AtMEP had not incurred extra workload or that the workload was worth the benefits that the service provides.

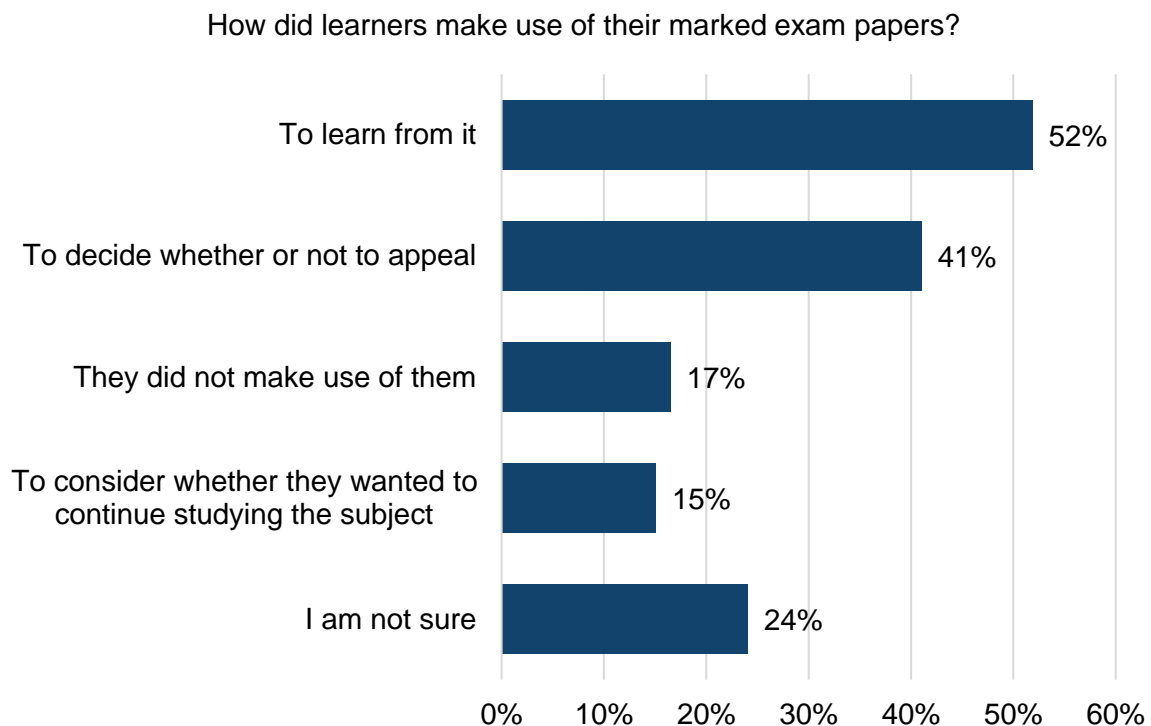
Any workload was worth the learning from receiving the scripts back.

I accept there is workload but feel this was and will be extremely useful.

Using marked exam papers

Respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were asked how learners had made use of their marked exam papers. They could choose more than one option. 52% said to learn from it, 41% said to decide whether or not to appeal, 17% said that they did not make use of them, and 15% said to consider whether they wanted to continue studying the subject. Additionally, 24% said they were not sure how learners had used their marked exam papers.

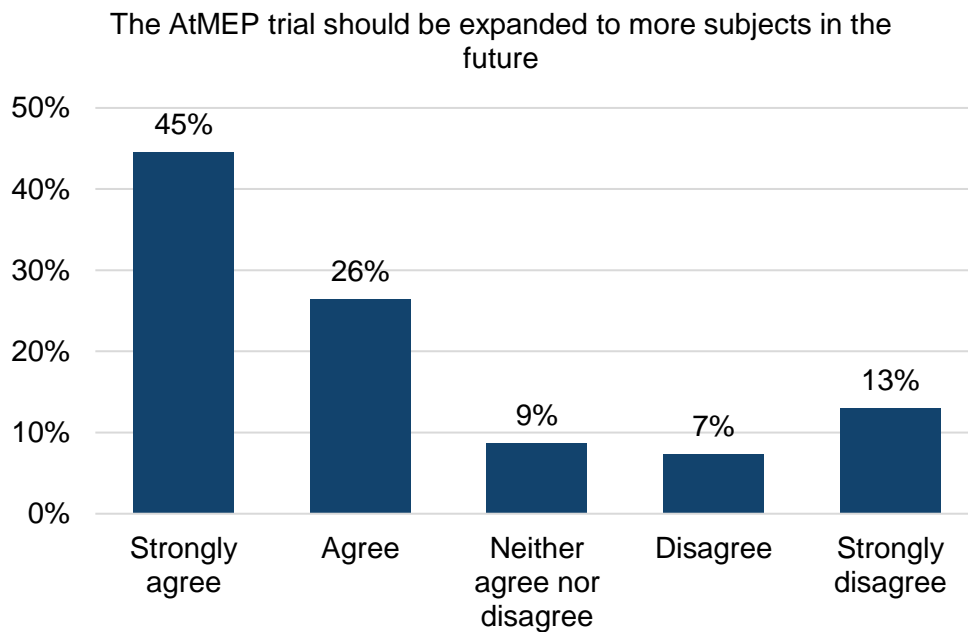
Figure 23: Practitioners who engaged — learners' use of marked exam papers



Scaling up

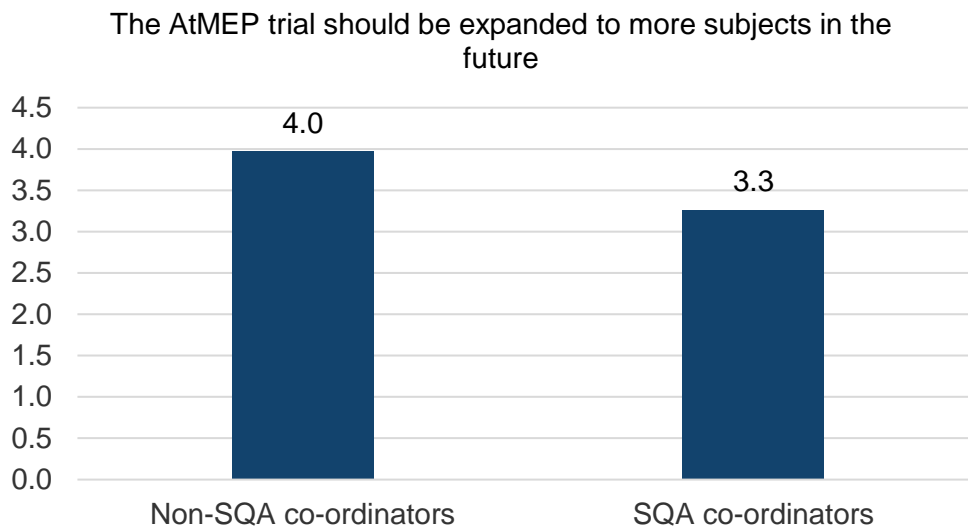
All respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that the AtMEP trial should be expanded to more subjects in the future. 45% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 9% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% disagreed, and 13% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.8.

Figure 24: All practitioners — the future of AtMEP



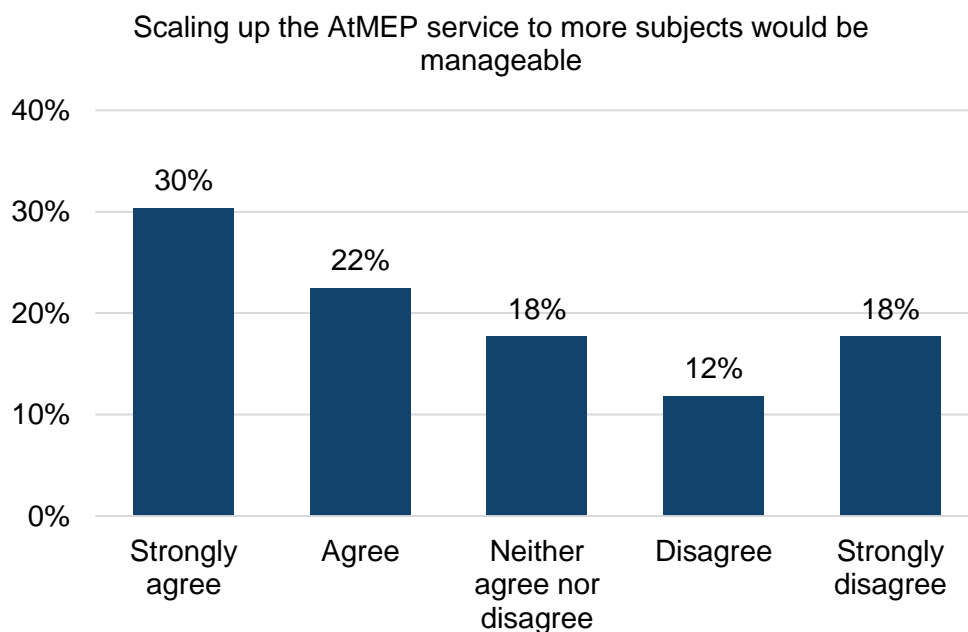
Respondents who were not SQA co-ordinators were more likely to agree that AtMEP should be expanded compared to those who were SQA co-ordinators (scores of 4.0 and 3.3, respectively), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(353)=3.96$, $p<0.0001$).

Figure 25: Mean scores on the future of AtMEP for those who are SQA co-ordinators and those who are not



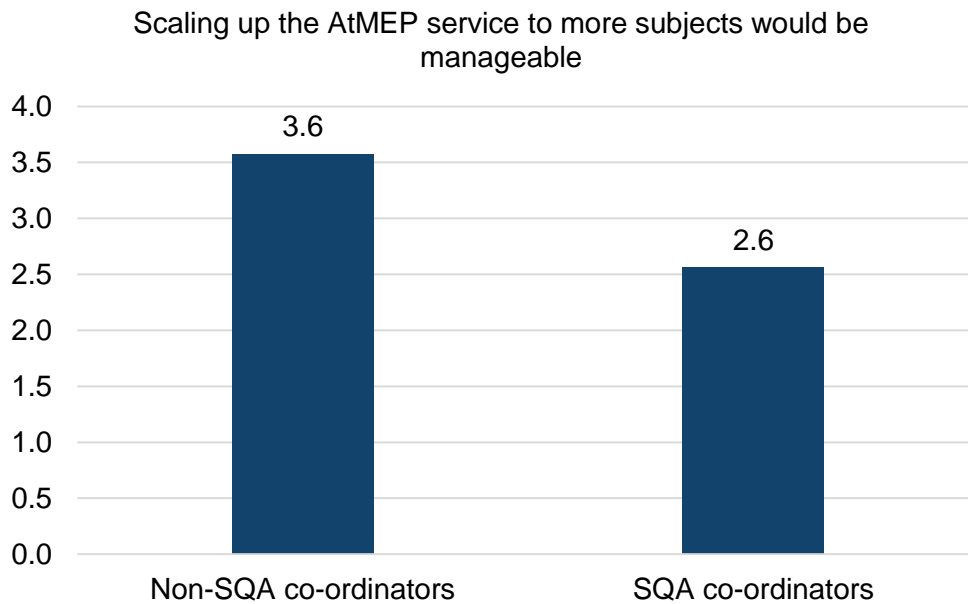
Respondents were also asked the extent to which they agreed that scaling up the AtMEP service to more subjects would be manageable. 30% strongly agreed, 22% agreed, 18% neither agreed nor disagreed, 12% disagreed, and 18% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.4.

Figure 26: All practitioners — manageability of scaling up AtMEP



Respondents who were not SQA co-ordinators were more likely to agree that scaling up AtMEP would be manageable compared to those who were SQA co-ordinators (scores of 3.6 and 2.6, respectively), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(354)=5.56$ $p<0.0001$).

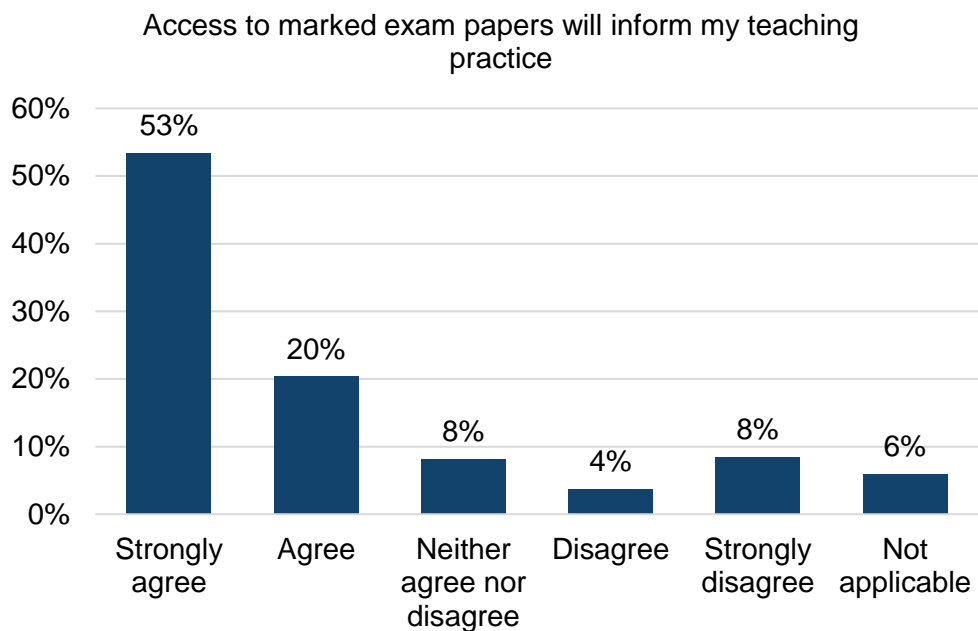
Figure 27: Mean scores on the manageability of scaling up AtMEP for those who are SQA co-ordinators and those who are not



Teaching and learning

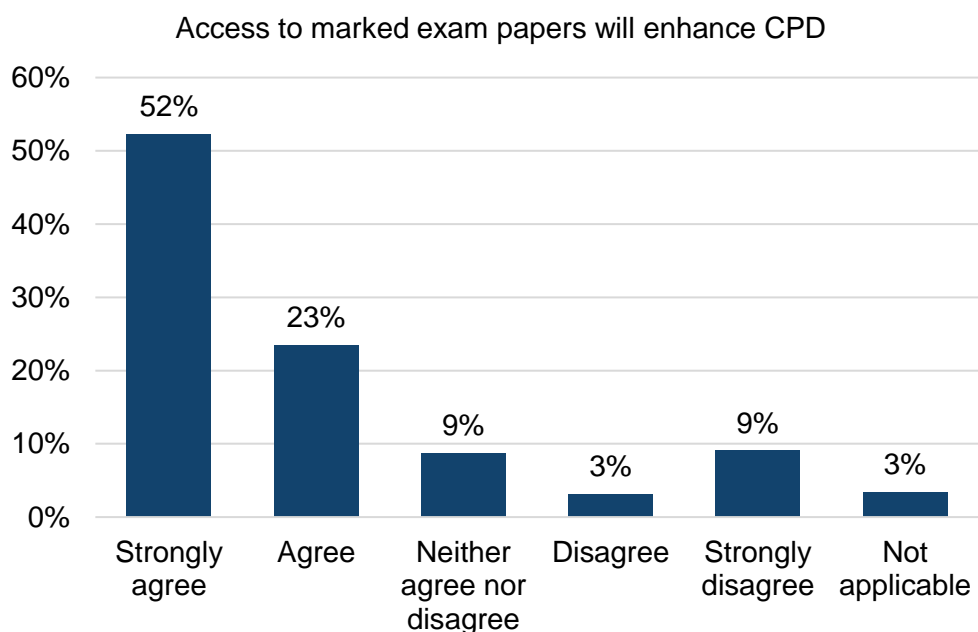
All respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that AtMEP would inform their teaching practice. The question was not applicable to 6%, but 53% strongly agreed, 20% agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 4% disagreed, and 8% strongly disagreed. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.1.

Figure 28: All practitioners — effect of AtMEP on teaching practice



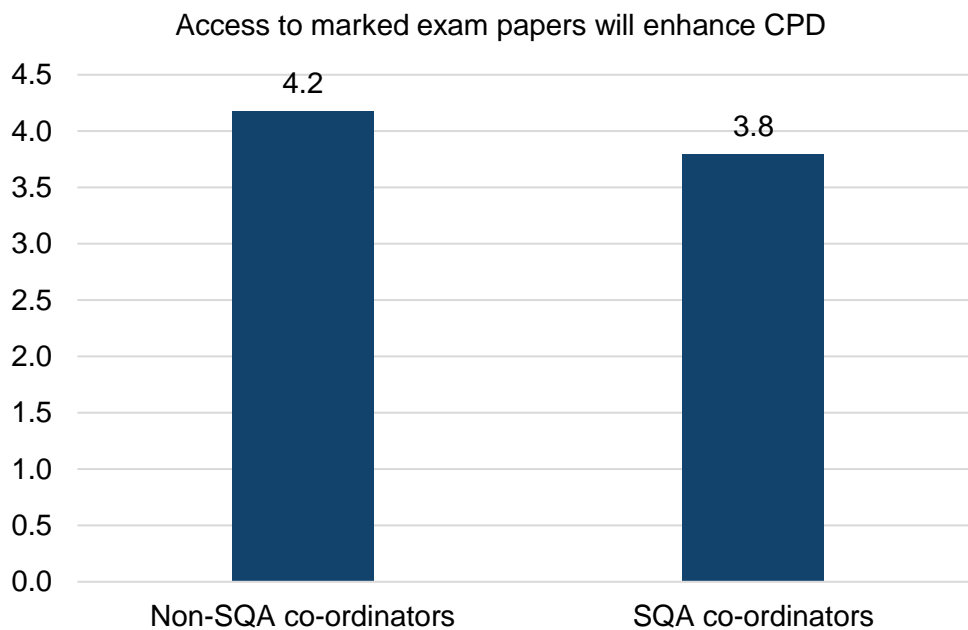
Respondents were then asked the extent to which they agreed that AtMEP would enhance CPD. The question was not applicable to 3%, but 52% strongly agreed, 23% agreed, 9% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.1.

Figure 29: All practitioners — effect of AtMEP on CPD



Respondents who were not SQA co-ordinators were more likely to agree that AtMEP will enhance CPD compared to those who were SQA co-ordinators (scores of 4.2 and 3.8, respectively), and this difference was statistically significant ($t(340)=2.18$, $p=0.03$).

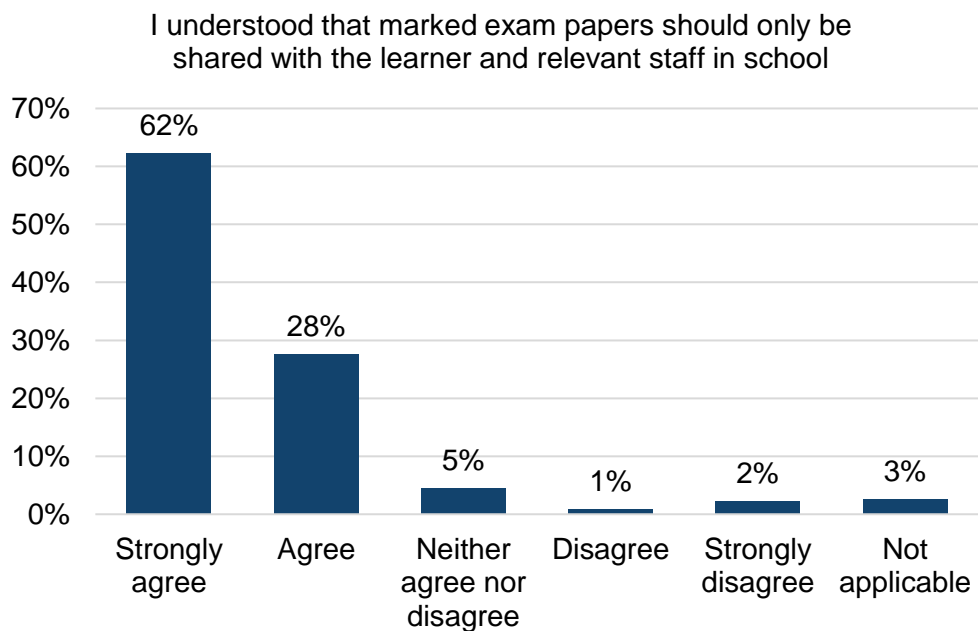
Figure 30: Mean scores on the effect of AtMEP on CPD for those who are SQA co-ordinators and those who are not



Using marked exam papers more widely

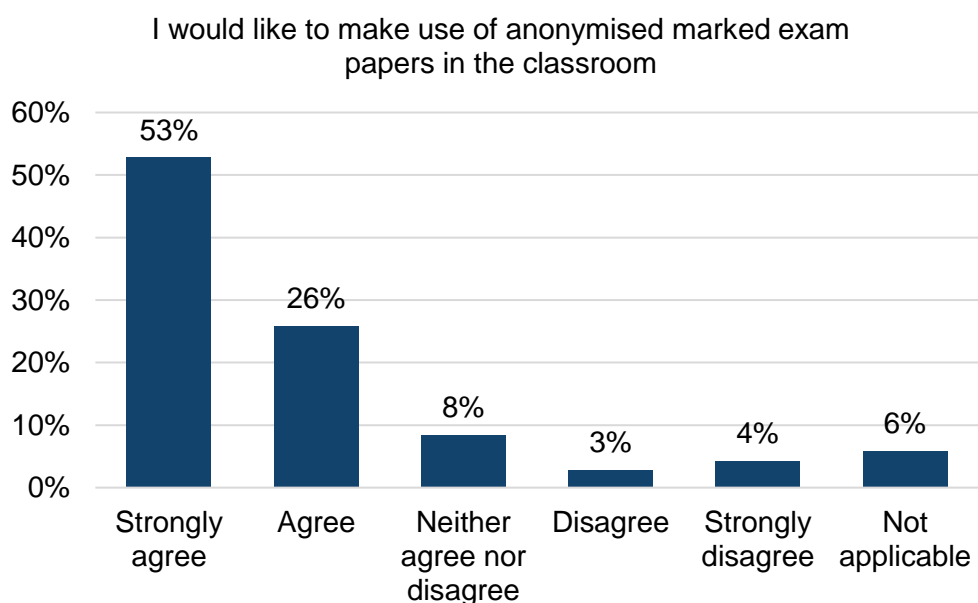
All respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed that they had understood that marked exam papers should only be shared with the learner and relevant staff in school. The question was not applicable to 3%, but 62% strongly agreed, 28% agreed, 5% neither agreed nor disagreed, 1% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.5.

Figure 31: All practitioners — constraints on sharing marked exam papers



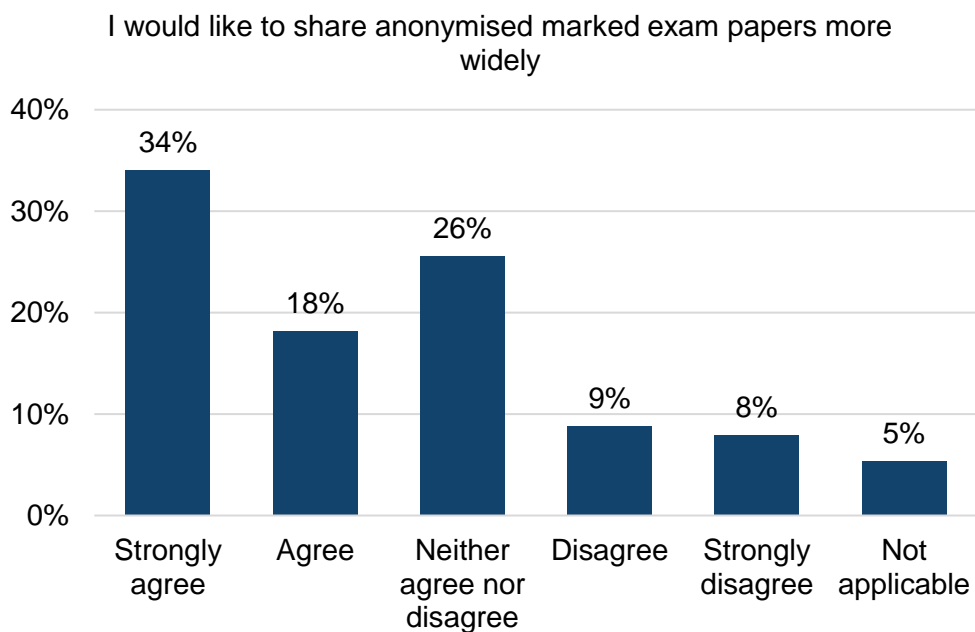
Respondents were then asked the extent to which they agreed that they would like to make use of anonymised marked exam papers in the classroom. The question was not applicable to 6%, but 53% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, 8% neither agreed nor disagreed, 3% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.3.

Figure 32: All practitioners — using marked exam papers in the classroom



Then respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement ‘I would like to share anonymised marked exam papers more widely’. The question was not applicable to 5%, but 34% strongly agreed, 18% agreed, 26% neither agreed nor disagreed, 9% disagreed, and 8% strongly disagreed. Excluding not applicable, the mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.7.

Figure 33: All practitioners — sharing marked exam papers more widely



Benefits

All respondents were asked what they thought the main benefits of AtMEP are. There were substantive responses from 225 practitioners. Most of the comments referenced benefits related to teaching and learning.

The most common theme was that AtMEP would prove beneficial in terms of practitioners further understanding the required standards and the application of the marking scheme. Some respondents suggested that insights garnered from marked exam papers would ensure that practitioners are kept up to date on standards, particularly as they evolve over time.

Better understanding of the marking schemes and how this is put into practice.

This allows teachers to see how marking instructions are being applied.

The main benefit is an understanding of the national standard and of applying SQA marking instructions accurately.

However, a small number of respondents thought that marked exam papers would be more helpful with more explanations or annotations, in line with Understanding Standards materials.

The second most common theme was that AtMEP could be beneficial in terms of informing and improving teaching practice. Some respondents thought that accessing marked exam papers would allow them to reflect on and enhance their practice in a way that would benefit learner attainment.

Following the ability to access some of the marked papers, I have been able to reflect on my own practice and to ensure that my teaching is in line with SQA standards. I have found this invaluable and is something that I would find hugely beneficial going forward.

More specifically, a few respondents suggested that AtMEP could help identify a practitioner's strengths and weaknesses to improve teaching approach or practice. Related to this, several respondents thought that AtMEP would help teachers and learners identify learners' strengths and weaknesses, allowing specific topics, techniques, or skills to be targeted in class; this was thought particularly worthwhile if a learner was progressing in or re-sitting the subject. Likewise, a few respondents thought that the main benefit of AtMEP was in learner exam preparation.

Also under the broad theme of teaching and learning, several respondents simply suggested that AtMEP's main benefit was CPD, and a few thought its main advantage would be in the provision of exemplars for use in teaching and learning.

A few respondents commented that AtMEP's main benefit was transparency. This was framed both in terms of learners and practitioners being able to see where marks were gained or lost, and also more generally in terms of SQA being open about its marking processes.

Transparency about how/where marks are awarded.

Improved public confidence in the marking process and ... in the application of the national standard.

Related to this openness, one respondent thought AtMEP's benefit would be that it would ensure that all learners get the grades their work warrants.

Ultimately, every pupil should end up with the grade their performance deserved, as marking anomalies and iniquities can be detected and resolved.

A small number of respondents suggested that access to marked assignments or performances would be more useful than access to marked exam papers, particularly in certain subjects.

Only a few comments maintained that the main benefit of AtMEP was its role in supporting learner decisions on appeals.

We used it simply to check whether an appeal was worthwhile.

Informed appeals as [for] some pupils it was clear they underperformed. [Previously] I would have put them in for an appeal.

A small number of respondents did not think that AtMEP had any benefits for learners. These comments suggested that, in the main, learners accessed their marked exam papers out of curiosity to no real effect. A few respondents also thought that there were no benefits to AtMEP overall, or that these benefits compared poorly to the benefits of accessing Understanding Standards resources. A couple of respondents suggested that any benefits of AtMEP were outweighed by the workload implications.

Finally, a few respondents called attention to what they perceived as marking issues highlighted by AtMEP. Some of these respondents thought that AtMEP would allow them to identify inconsistencies or unfairness in marking.

Drawbacks

All respondents were asked if there were any drawbacks to accessing marked exam papers; 219 commented. Around a quarter of these respondents overtly said that there were no drawbacks to the AtMEP service.

The biggest drawback to schools and practitioners was deemed to be workload. Over half of the respondents who listed drawbacks mentioned workload issues. Types of workload drawbacks varied; sometimes respondents just listed 'workload', but others also made more specific comments, such as:

- AtMEP was time consuming, in terms of getting permission for, downloading, and finding security and storage for marked exam papers. In particular, this was highlighted as a workload issue for SQA co-ordinators.
- An additional workload for practitioners was checking marked exam papers for errors or helping learners understand their marked exam papers.
- Some thought that AtMEP was resource intensive and would generate unpaid work, more administration, and more bureaucracy.

Another perceived drawback to centres was a lack of clarity around the use of marked exam papers. Some drawbacks arose from centres thinking the service should primarily be for practitioners; that is, learner permissions had obstructed them from seeing enough marked exam papers.

The way it is managed - it was gatekept in my school which made the process difficult.

Likewise, several respondents highlighted that the only drawback to the service was not accessing enough marked exam papers, suggesting that they valued AtMEP's potential for teaching and learning.

In a small school I only had a few pupils ask for their papers and therefore I only got a very small insight into what went well and vice versa. If I had access to all papers, I would have been able to see the whole picture and be able to find more significant patterns.

However, on the other hand, several respondents described the service as not required with regards to CPD because materials to help practitioners understand standards and marking are already provided. Several also suggested AtMEP was not useful to learners and that the service should only be for practitioners. Relatedly, a few thought the purpose of AtMEP was not clear.

One common drawback cited was perceived issues with marking. Sometimes respondents suggested that marking inconsistencies were a potential drawback to SQA and that they would increase appeals. Others thought such inconsistencies were a drawback for practitioners and would result in them questioning marking quality. However, in many cases, it was unclear if respondents thought that having knowledge of marking inconsistencies in and of itself is a drawback or if the perceived inconsistencies themselves are the drawback.

Seeing marking instructions being ignored and appeals refused, what is the point in the subject if markers aren't competent enough to follow a simple right or wrong marking instructions? ... [It] has demoralised pupils and discredited the subject.

Frustration when correct case studies etc are not given a mark or when seeing that points that would have previously got a mark now don't get a mark when information had not been given out about this.

This related to another drawback raised by a few practitioners, that there is not a system in place for practitioners or learners to raise marking concerns with SQA or a way for SQA to rectify such marking issues.

Disagreeing with marker but not being able to do anything about it.

With regards to perceived issues with marking, a few responses were from SQA markers. Some of these respondents thought the drawback to the service was practitioners, parents or carers, and learners not fully understanding the marking process.

Pupils may not understand why they got the marks or didn't get marks as some subjects are subjective this is a difficult situation for teachers to be

placed in to try and explain the marks to pupils if they have not been part of the marking process.

Indeed, a few respondents suggested that a drawback was with learners and parents or carers questioning or disputing marks. This was considered a drawback because respondents thought that learners might question their professionalism or that AtMEP might create conflict between themselves and learners.

Pupils will nit-pick about the marking and increase the remarking numbers even higher.

Students feel they should have got marks when they were not awarded them.

A few other respondents saw the potential for controversy for SQA and the increased risk of legal repercussions. Lastly, a few respondents highlighted other perceived drawbacks of AtMEP to SQA. These included potential problems with recruiting markers in the future due to increased marking scrutiny and the potential for increased workload for SQA.

Improvements

Finally, practitioner respondents were asked if there were any improvements that they would suggest for the future; 160 respondents submitted comments. The vast majority of comments could be grouped under four main themes: learner permissions, expanding the service, marking, and operational changes.

On permissions, the most prominent message was that learner permission should be assumed or based on an opt-out rather than opt-in model. Others suggested that if learner permission was required, it should be secured at an early stage.

Teachers should be allowed to access the scripts without pupil permission.

Bulk downloads without learner permission being required.

An opt-out system for sharing scripts with centres.

Pupils giving consent to access papers before they sit the exams.

Related to this, a few comments stated that they would like SQA to provide anonymised marked exam papers (without a learner permission requirement) to centres for CPD purposes, and several suggested that the service should be learner direct in future. However, it should be noted that these suggested improvements were not mutually exclusive; some practitioners would like the service to be learner direct but also have the discretion to access marked exam papers for CPD and teaching and learning purposes.

There needs to be an ability to access anonymised papers that class teachers will be able to use for CPD and learning purposes.

Learners would need to be able to download the papers themselves, perhaps from MySQA, in order to take the SQA co-ordinator out of the equation.

Directly to candidates through their MySQA accounts. This could also be extended to providing candidates access to their component marks through MySQA.

Students accessing the papers direct from SQA and can tick a box to say school can access it too and we can download all papers that have been approved at one go from SQA Connect.

On expanding AtMEP, several respondents suggested that the service be broadened to include more, or all, subjects. A couple contrasted the situation in Scotland with that in the rest of the UK, where access to marked exam papers has been available for some years.

Expand to all subjects

I can't believe this feature is only being trialled now. It's a must-have.

Several other respondents thought that access should not just be to marked exam papers, but to marked assignments, folios and performances. In some subjects, practitioners thought that these components would provide more valuable information.

Full breakdowns of all assessable parts of every course to allow evaluation, moderation and improvement.

A few respondents commented that SQA needs to ensure that marking is correct and consistent between markers and learners. A couple suggested that increased transparency could improve the standard of marking. A few respondents also requested that the marking on available marked exam papers should be clearer, particularly the allocation of marks on four- (or more) mark items.

Some of the scripts have no ticks/crosses on them, therefore, it actually makes it difficult to understand where marks have been allocated despite being able to see the overall mark for each question.

A few respondents said that they would like more marking information in the future, including on marking tolerances. A couple said that they would like marking instructions released earlier or question papers, marking instructions, and marked exam papers all released at the same time. A small number also commented on potential improvements to Understanding Standards, although these comments did not appear to be directly related to AtMEP.

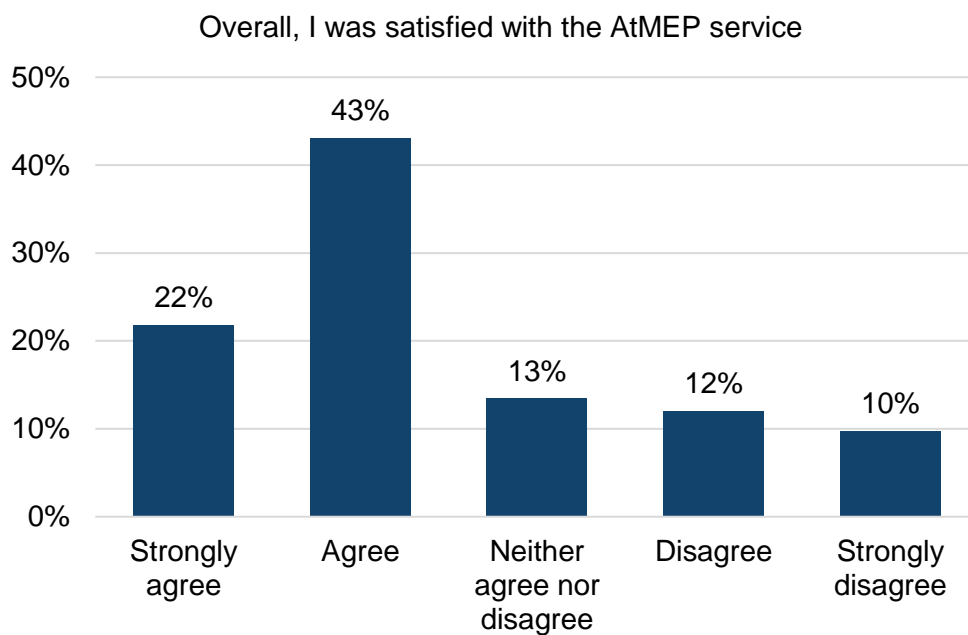
On operational changes, a few respondents thought that accessing marked exam papers should be easier. Suggestions included a more streamlined system, file names to include learner names rather than just SCNs, access for subject teachers as well as SQA co-ordinators, and a more straightforward search function. A small number of practitioners said that they would appreciate a mark summary or breakdown for each learner, rather than or in addition to the whole marked exam paper. A few respondents also thought that the AtMEP service should be open for a longer period of time; a couple suggested for the whole academic year.

Finally, while a few respondents said that there were no improvements that they could suggest, a similar number suggested that the service be discontinued. A couple mentioned that if AtMEP were to be continued, then workload concerns should be addressed.

Overall satisfaction

Finally, respondents who had engaged with the AtMEP trial were asked the extent to which they agreed with the statement 'Overall, I was satisfied with the access to marked exam papers service'. 22% strongly agreed, 43% agreed, 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 12% disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.6.

Figure 34: Practitioners who engaged - overall satisfaction



Practitioner interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine practitioners who had engaged with the AtMEP trial. These practitioners, who included SQA co-ordinators and subject teachers, volunteered to take part in interview through the survey. Interviews explored practitioners' broad views on AtMEP, their experiences of the service this year, the potential benefits and drawbacks of the service, suggestions for improvements and future considerations.

Interviewees comprised two subject teachers who teach subjects in the AtMEP trial and seven SQA co-ordinators (two deputy head teachers, three subject teachers for other subjects, and two non-teaching staff).

Communication and guidance

While a couple of participants did acknowledge that the first year of implementation can be a learning curve, most interviewees suggested that SQA's AtMEP communication and guidance were clear and useful.

The information we're given was all very clear and we knew exactly what to expect.

It was really useful to have the consent form, and the instructions were clear.

However, not all participants were as positive. A couple of participants felt strongly that information on the service should have been disseminated earlier (one suggested pre-Christmas, another in March). One interviewee expressed disappointment that news of the 2024 AtMEP trial was released on social media rather than in discussion with schools.

Others thought that communication and guidance were not clear enough on how the service should work, or not clear enough early enough; this was particularly true of the issue of learner permission. Other issues raised included uncertainties around how centres should handle queries from parents or carers, whether or not learners could take their marked exam papers away, which marked exam papers would not be available due to exceptions, and how teachers could use marked exam papers.

Two interviewees suggested that this perceived lack of clarity meant that decisions had to be taken at a regional or centre level, and this heightened the potential for inconsistent practice across the country.

Purpose and usage

When discussing the purpose of AtMEP and how it was used, its role in learner decision on appeals was relatively infrequently mentioned by practitioners. A couple of participants did say that learners or centres had looked at a marked exam paper with a view to appealing, but another couple said that AtMEP was not used for this purpose at all. Moreover, there was some disquiet expressed at the notion that this is what AtMEP should be for.

It's quite a lot for a candidate to go through and check their marking against the mark scheme when they don't really have that knowledge.

In saying that it's going to impact on the appeals process is starting to imply that there's an expectation that teachers would be scrutinising scripts ...

That's suggesting that teachers are going to become responsible for checking SQA's work.

Instead, most feedback suggested that learners had just wanted to look at their marked exam paper out of interest or to see where they had made mistakes. Relatedly, one interviewee from an independent school suggested that they would have a lot of parents or carers interested in seeing marked exam papers. Several participants specifically noted that higher attaining learners were more likely to have accessed their marked exam paper.

I think they were just curious to see exactly where they had gone wrong and where they had dropped marks. Any mistakes that they had made. Curiosity, I think, played a big part in it. They were just interested in seeing exactly how they had done in the exam.

I would say a lot of the kids would be curious to see their ticks and their crosses and where the marks are coming from, just because that's what they would be like for normal class tests or prelims.

While a couple of participants thought that this usage of AtMEP could be valuable in informing learners' future study practices, others were less convinced of its benefits, particularly if learners are not intending to re-sit.

They're not going to be able to apply any learning ... from it. They're not going to take what they have gained from looking at that paper and apply it to stronger attainment next time around because they're not sitting the same paper, they're not sitting the same level, they're not sitting the same subject.

Interview participants overwhelmingly envisioned AtMEP's main benefits in terms of teaching and learning or CPD. Some participants thought that AtMEP has the potential to enhance teaching practice and the understanding of the standard. These interviewees thought that AtMEP could help them, and other subject teachers, to identify strengths and weaknesses and adjust their practice accordingly.

I thought it was excellent. You know, we definitely saw some insights into things that we probably thought we were doing properly, but now we realise we needed to tighten up on.

We can adjust teaching appropriately based on how our actual kids have performed. Nothing is a better predictor of our ability to teach as what the kids produce when they're doing their exams.

For inexperienced teachers, I think it would be ... you know, if I had had this information a number of years ago, it would have been really, really helpful for my professional development.

I think it definitely has the potential to improve ... everybody's teaching.

Only one participant stated that they did not think that AtMEP would have an impact on CPD or on teaching practice. They thought that Understanding Standards resources are sufficient.

Learner permissions

While most participants highlighted AtMEP's potential for teaching and learning benefits, there was a sense from some that this usage was inhibited by the learner permission model.

All of the interviewees said that their centre had received written permission from learners to access their marked exam papers and most suggested that this was straightforward. However, the way in which this was undertaken varied. Some created their own forms, while others used SQA's template. Some centres waited for learners to approach them about AtMEP, while others wrote to learners advising them of the service.

One participant said that their centre had requested and received written permission from learners to download their marked exam papers, even when learners themselves had no interest in seeing them. Another stated that downloaded marked exam papers were anonymised for use across the department for CPD purposes.

A couple of interviewees mentioned that the process of getting learner permission had been time consuming. Indeed, all of the participants suggested changes, to a greater or lesser extent, to the learner permission model.

Firstly, a number suggested that they would collect learner permissions before results day, or even before exams, both to ease August workload for centres and to be better able to contact learners.

If we do roll this out on a larger scale, I would just collect this from pupils in March or April time. I would collect whether they wanted it sent to them or whether they were just giving permission for us to access.

If I need to collect consent, I really want to know that before the kids go on study leave.

The pupils were on holiday, so it might have been helpful if before we broke up for holidays that pupils had been given the chance to give a notification of 'Yes, I'm happy for the scripts to be accessed'.

One practitioner suggested an opt-out model:

Can we send a letter out to the cohort and say we will be [accessing] unless you say otherwise? Is that allowed?

Secondly, a number of participants thought that the AtMEP service should be learner direct. Several interviewees mentioned that they thought giving learners access to marked exam papers through MySQA would ease centre workload concerns at the same time as addressing permission and data protection issues.

I think it should be on the pupil. I don't see why the school are involved in that step, especially when you've got leavers as well.

If there was a pupil access system that allowed them just to see ... they've got their MySQA... If that could be developed and they could get it themselves ... That takes a pressure away from school, yeah.

However, a couple of participants emphasised that even if the AtMEP service was learner direct, they would still appreciate being able to see marked exam papers themselves, perhaps after a learner had ticked a box consenting to such usage when requesting.

By contrast, a number of participants did not think that learner permission was necessary at all. This was on the basis both of reducing centre workload (it would be far easier to bulk download) and that practitioners did not see as many marked exam papers as they would have liked for CPD and teaching and learning purposes.

We did question why we weren't allowed to download them all in one go.

I don't really understand the need to get learners permission ... we've got their assignments... I don't get why that's such a big issue.

The whole mantra of educators and teachers is to constantly learn to constantly improve, to refine your practice, to improve yourself, to get the best outcomes for the kids, and [learner permissions are] a barrier that's stopping them getting access to something that will really, really benefit them.

All the scripts I looked at were candidates that were getting A ... it would have been helpful if I didn't have to ask the permission, and I could have just got ... a better sample.

Workload

In general, participants did not think that the AtMEP trial had caused significant workload issues in their centres. A couple said that any additional workload was manageable or was worth it for the benefits.

I mean, it's something you take on board. I would have thought anything that's going to further your knowledge and make you a better teacher and be able to put things across better ... it's going to be a good thing, so I'm willing to put the time in, you know.

However, a number of participants were very clear that the additional workload was manageable this year only because they had had relatively few requests to download marked exam papers and only a limited number of subjects were involved. Practitioners' concerns about workload in future years are covered in the 'future considerations' section below.

There were comments about the timing of the service. A couple of participants suggested that the service should remain open across the academic year. Another few commented that the AtMEP service opening when it did meant that practitioners had had to come in to work over the holiday period.

At that point ... the only staff in school are staff who are dealing specifically with exam results issues. So, for example support for applying to university or support for a subject choice. We don't have all subject specialists in school.

This leads on to concerns about learner support requirements and expectations. While some participants said that learners did not require support with their marked exam papers or that support was specifically not offered on papers that centres themselves had not marked, others were less clear on what the expectations of subject teachers were.

There was a real lack of clarity around what was actually expected of teachers.

If every child needs the marking instructions explained to them, how many conversations is that for an individual classroom teacher when they've got a full teaching commitment already?

A few participants also mentioned the challenges of dealing with queries from parents or carers associated with AtMEP. There were concerns that practitioners' professionalism could be called into question as a result.

It required the class teacher having a meeting with the parent and the pupil to go through to explain... Now, if everybody was to do that, that would be quite a lot of time.

There are discussions with families that will inevitably have to happen if families are questioning the marking.

Could be devastating for a young teacher... You really are in a very vulnerable position.

Operational issues

Most participants thought that the process of downloading marked exam papers was straightforward. Several mentioned that SQA Connect is easy to use. However, there were several suggestions to streamline the process, including:

- group components to be downloaded at the same time
- file names to include learner name as well as SCN
- noting marked exam papers that are not available for exceptions and why
- requiring fewer clicks: for example, allowing bulk downloads, listing more learners per page, ensuring everything (question papers, marking instructions, guidance, and so on) is available in the same place, and assuming centres have received learner permission

Marking

While some participants thought that practitioners and learners would benefit from more information on marking practices, such as grade boundaries and marking tolerances, others were less supportive.

I think pupils have no idea about tolerances and that's obviously a real issue when it comes to appeals because of the tolerances applied ... I think there's some teachers that have got no idea about exam procedures ... I think it's really important.

Yeah, tolerances are the main one. I think grade boundaries they all get. ... But it's this tolerance ... I think that kind of needs to be a little bit clearer.

They're 15, 16 years old. They need teaching and learning of relevant information, but they don't need to understand the admin practices of the SQA.

Similarly, while a number of interviewees said that they found the marking instructions useful in the context of AtMEP, there were mixed views on whether they were useful to learners or not.

They don't fully understand the marking instructions so without, you know, intense support from a classroom teacher they can't really engage with it.

There were also some comments on perceived inconsistencies in the application of marking instructions or that these changed over time without practitioners' knowledge.

Indeed, perceived marking issues was a clear theme to emerge from practitioner interviews. Some participants raised concerns that AtMEP will potentially reveal marking mistakes or inconsistencies that could increase SQA workload and cause reputational damage.

It's like opening a Pandora's box, really. Because you're going to get ... unreasonable people who will go mad about this.

It would be lovely if everyone marked everything perfectly. We know that's unrealistic.

Are the SQA going to be bringing themselves open to heavy criticism for there being inconsistencies with marking or incorrect grades because it hasn't been marked correctly?

I know everybody marks differently and I know you've got all these checks in place... but you don't check every single exam for every single marker.

Participants also queried what recourse they would have in cases of marking issues identified through AtMEP.

You could end up with a lot of extra work at a SQA level, you know, like answering questions about why.

*What do we do when the marking doesn't match the course and descriptor?
... How do we clarify?*

I'm curious to know what the procedure would be if something has been what we deem incorrectly marked.

One participant was particularly frustrated by perceived marking inconsistencies highlighted by AtMEP in their centre. They suggested that they were disappointed by what they saw as issues with marking and concerned about any repercussions about their own professional judgement.

I was shocked at the quality of marking ... we couldn't believe that there were candidates that were getting marks for saying something, and a pupil that was basically saying exactly the same thing wasn't getting marks ... And I'm actually quite glad that my candidates didn't really look too closely at their exam scripts because it could have been horrendously embarrassing ... professionally awful for me.

Future considerations

One participant said that they did not think that AtMEP should be further rolled out, but a few others said that they would like it expanded to more subjects and a couple thought that it would be useful for coursework rather than just marked exam papers.

However, the most prominent theme when discussing the scalability of AtMEP was whether the associated workload would be manageable.

Two participants said that they thought the AtMEP model was scalable. Both suggested that workload would increase, but that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, most participants thought that while the AtMEP workload was manageable this year, due to the limited number of subjects and downloads, they repeatedly stated that this model would not be manageable if scaled up.

Many of the interviewees were SQA co-ordinators who had been solely responsible for gathering permissions and downloading and disseminating marked exam papers. They were worried about how they would manage that if all subjects were included. This was true even of participants who were, on the whole, supportive of AtMEP. There were also concerns expressed about the level of learner support or feedback that would be required.

The issue is if this rolls out, it's going to really, really cripple schools.

If this was to give across every subject and every learner, then I'm not quite sure how I would do it.

I think if one of the subjects such as English did become available, which I think [would] actually be very good ... I'm not quite sure how we would staff it.

If we'd been hit this year by everybody that wanted it, that would have been an absolute nightmare, never mind adding on... we have some subjects that we have 180 kids sit at in one go. So, you know, it's definitely not scalable.

Finally, some participants were keen to understand what the expectations of practitioners and learners would be were the AtMEP service to be scaled up.

Suggestions included SQA clearly stating what it believes the purpose of the service is for both practitioners and learners and what level of support SQA expects practitioners to provide to learners.

I'm really keen to understand ... what the SQA expectation is ... How do we manage this? I think for them to share their understanding with us so that they know what they're asking of us when they make the service available, you know, that would be really helpful.

The benefit is massive CPD for staff in particular, but as a learner I just wonder what they would be expected to do with [it].

Learner evaluation

A large-scale survey gathering both qualitative and quantitative data was distributed via SQA co-ordinators to learners who interacted with the AtMEP service on their experiences and perceptions.

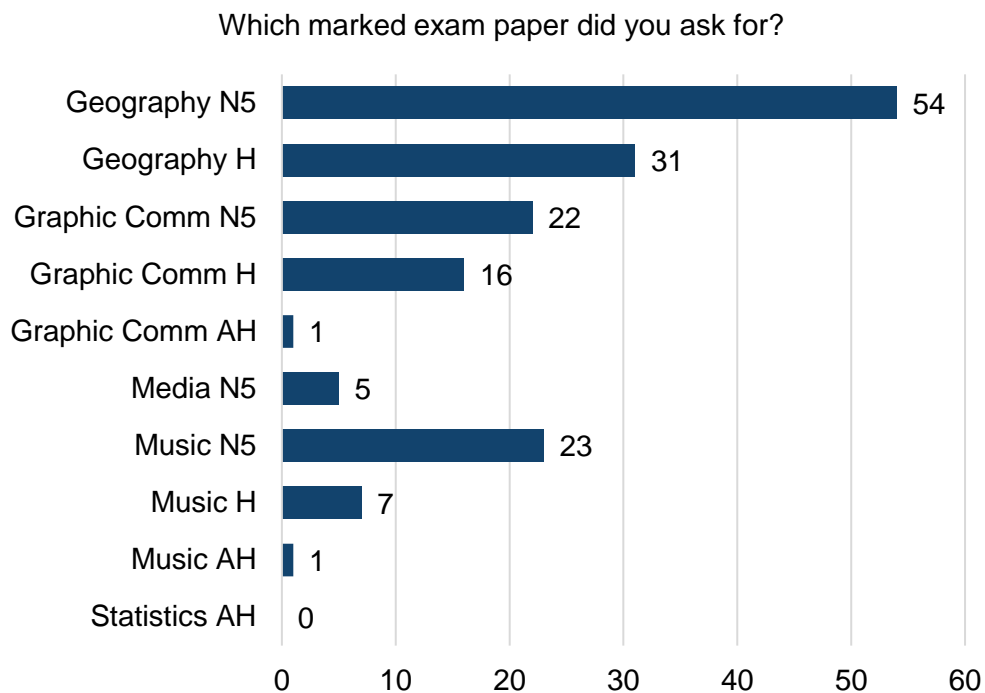
There were 146 substantive responses. It should be noted that not every respondent answered every question.

Respondent profiles

Learner respondents were asked which marked exam paper they had accessed. They could choose more than one.

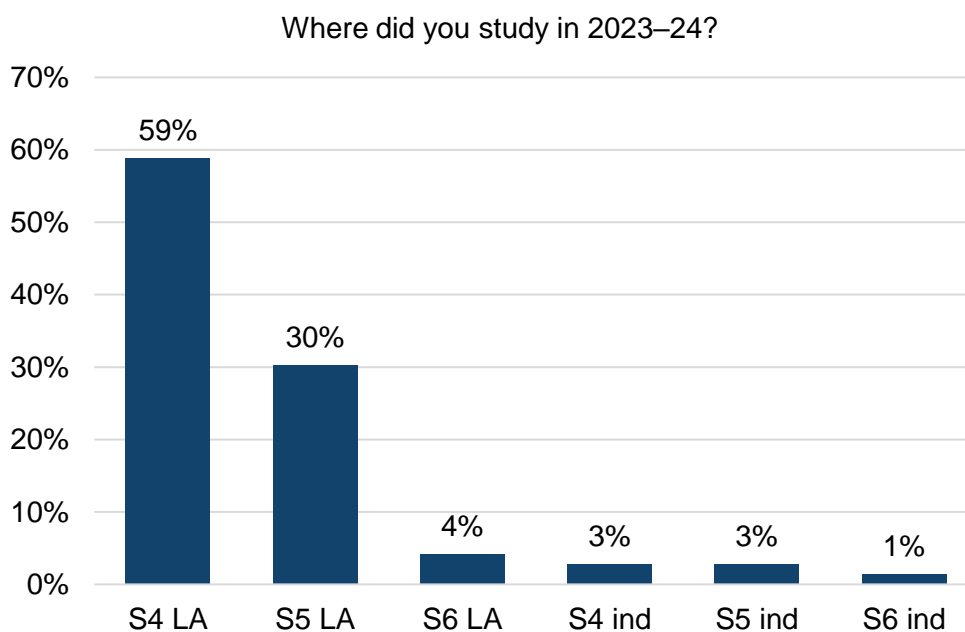
No respondents had accessed marked exam papers for Advanced Higher Statistics. On the other hand, 54 respondents had accessed a National 5 Geography marked paper, 31 a Higher Geography marked paper, 23 a National 5 Music marked paper, 22 a National 5 Graphic Communication marked paper, 16 a Higher Graphic Communication marked paper, seven a Higher Music marked exam paper, five a National 5 Media marked paper, one a Advanced Higher Graphic Communication marked paper, and one an Advanced Higher Music marked paper.

Figure 35: Learners — marked exam papers accessed



Respondents were asked where they had studied in 2023–24. 59% had been in S4 in a local authority school, 30% in S5 in a local authority school, 4% in S6 in a local authority school, 3% in S4 in an independent school, 3% in S5 in an independent school, and 1% in S6 in an independent school.

Figure 36: Learner respondents' centre type



Learner respondents came from across 18 local authority areas.

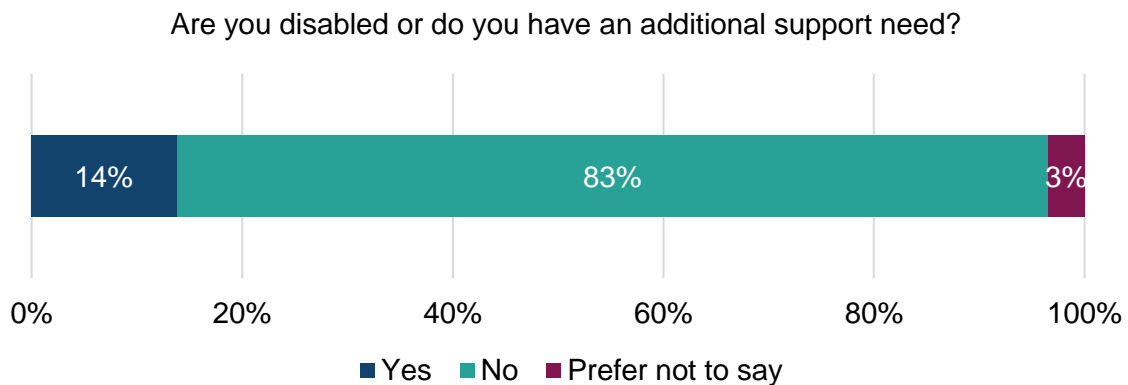
Table 3: Learner respondents' local authority areas

Respondent local authority area	Number of respondents	Proportion of respondents
Glasgow	25	18%
Scottish Borders	22	16%
Dumfries & Galloway	21	16%
Fife	14	10%
West Lothian	14	10%
South Lanarkshire	9	6%
North Lanarkshire	7	5%
Renfrewshire	7	5%
Aberdeen City	4	3%
Edinburgh	4	3%
Moray	4	3%
South Ayrshire	3	2%
Aberdeenshire	2	1%
Angus	2	1%
Falkirk	2	1%
Argyll & Bute	1	1%
Dundee City	1	1%
North Ayrshire	1	1%

No responses were received from learners in Clackmannanshire, East Ayrshire, East Dunbartonshire, East Lothian, East Renfrewshire, Eilean Siar, Highland, Inverclyde, Midlothian, Orkney Islands, Perth and Kinross, Shetland Islands, Stirling, or West Dunbartonshire.

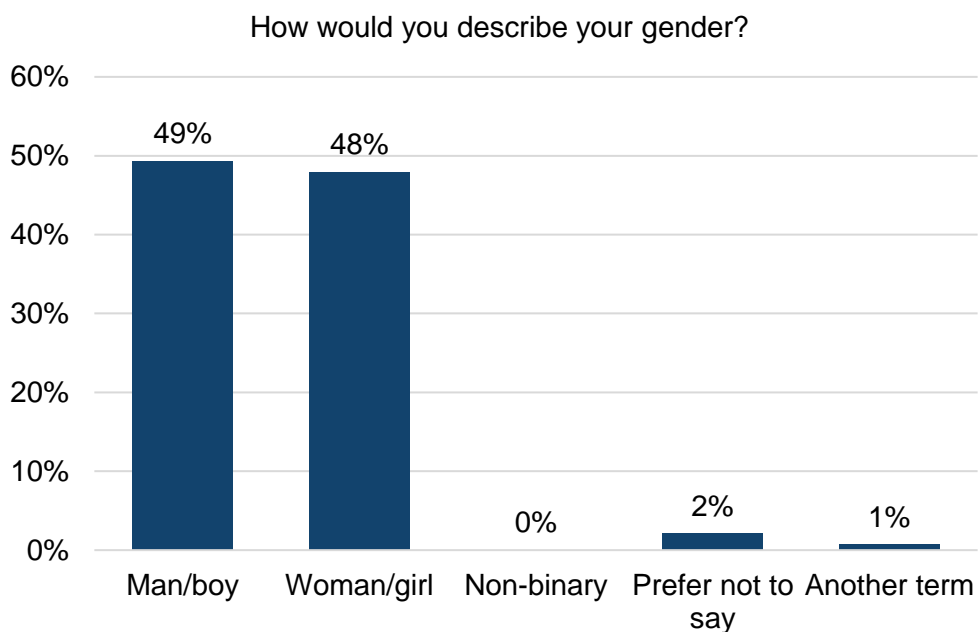
When asked if they were disabled or had an additional support need, 14% of respondents said yes, 83% said no, and 3% preferred not to say.

Figure 37: Learner respondents who are disabled or have an additional support need



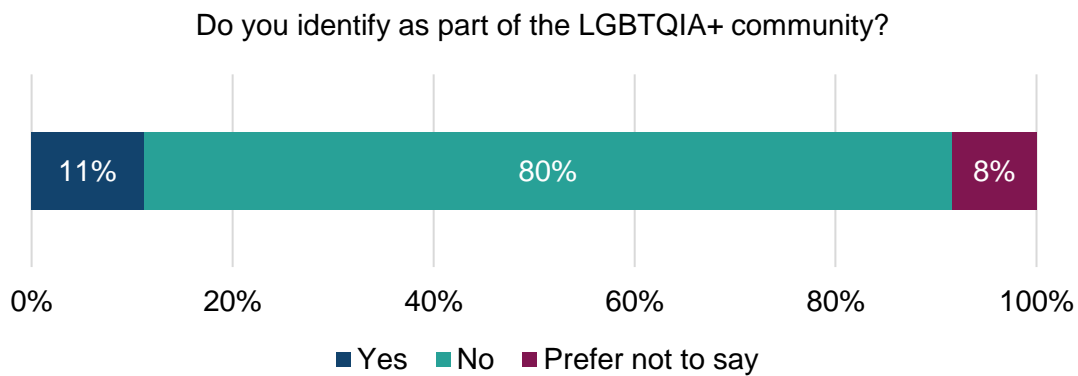
When asked how they would describe their gender, 49% of respondents said man/boy, 48% said woman/girl, and 1% said they used another term. 2% preferred not to say.

Figure 38: Learner respondents' gender



Respondents were asked if they identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community; 11% said yes, 80% said no, and 8% preferred not to say.

Figure 39: Learner respondents' LGBTQIA+ status



Respondents were asked how they would describe their ethnicity. Responses are detailed in the table below.

Table 4: Learner respondents' ethnicity

How would you describe your ethnicity?	Percentage of respondents
African	
African, African Scottish or African British	1%
Any other African ethnic group	0%
Arab	
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	1%
Any other Arab ethnic group	1%
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	
Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British	1%
Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British	4%
Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British	2%
Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish, Pakistani British	2%
Any other Asian ethnic group	0%
Caribbean or Black	
Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British	0%
Black, Black Scottish or Black British	0%
Any other Caribbean or Black ethnic group	1%

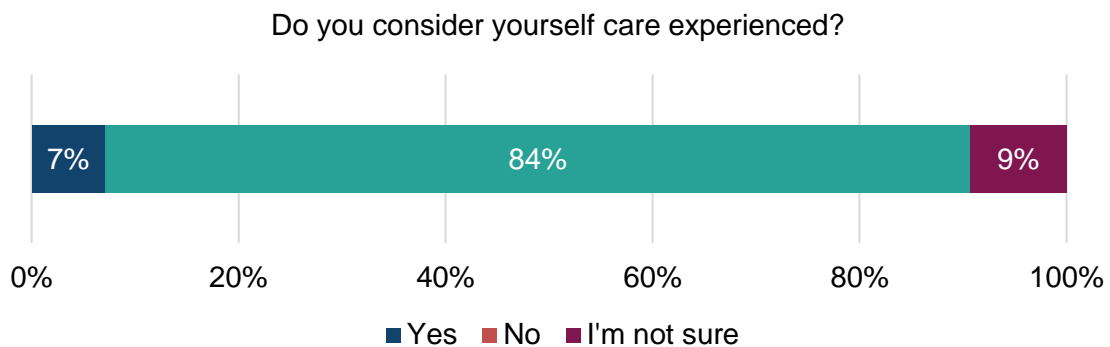
How would you describe your ethnicity?	Percentage of respondents
Any Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	
Any Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	2%
White	
Scottish	75%
Other British	6%
Irish	1%
Gypsy/Traveller	0%
Any other White ethnic group	3%
Prefer not to say	
Prefer not to say	0%

Overall, 85% of respondents were from the aggregated White ethnic group, 10% were from the aggregated Asian ethnic group, and 6% were from the aggregated African, aggregated Arab, aggregated Caribbean or Black, and Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups.

Respondents were asked if they considered themselves care experienced. They were informed that the term 'care experienced' refers to any person who is or has ever been in care or looked after for any length of time. This includes anyone who has ever been provided with care in a range of settings, such as foster care, residential care, kinship care, or through being looked after at home with supervision requirements.

While 83% of respondents said that they were not care experienced, 7% said that they were, and 9% were not sure.

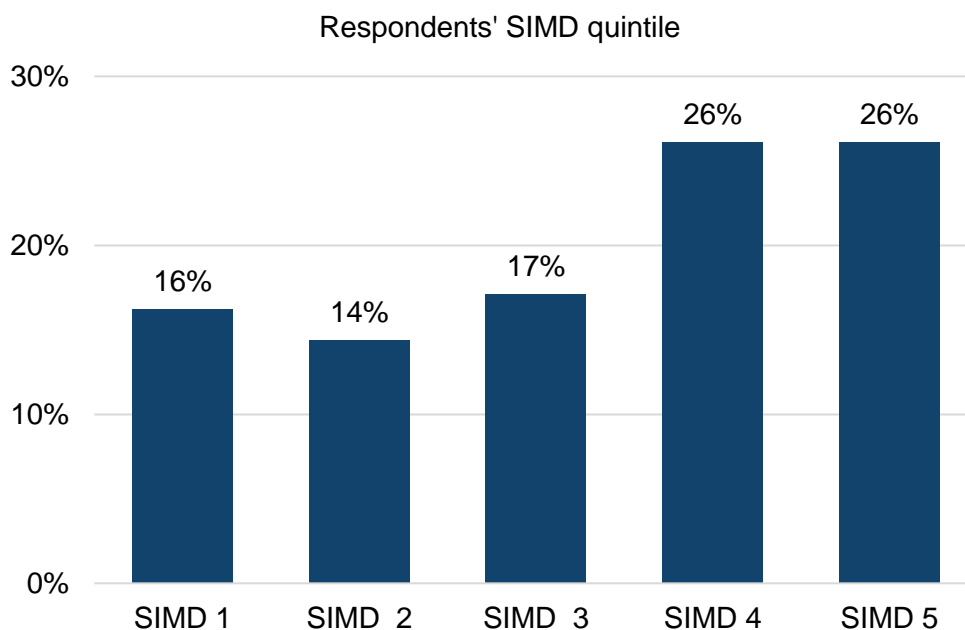
Figure 40: Learner respondents' care experience



Respondents were informed that SQA would use the [SIMD](#) to ensure that survey responses came from a representative range of learners from across Scotland. Therefore, they were asked for their postcode so that it could be converted into an SIMD quintile. SIMD quintile 1 represents the 20% most deprived postcodes in Scotland, while SIMD quintile 5 represents the 20% least deprived postcodes.

A total of 111 respondents submitted a postcode that was recognised by the [Scottish Government's SIMD postcode lookup tool](#). Of these respondents, 16% had a postcode in SIMD quintile 1, 14% in SIMD quintile 2, 17% in SIMD quintile 3, 26% in SIMD quintile 4, and 26% in SIMD quintile 5.

Figure 41: Learner respondents by SIMD quintile



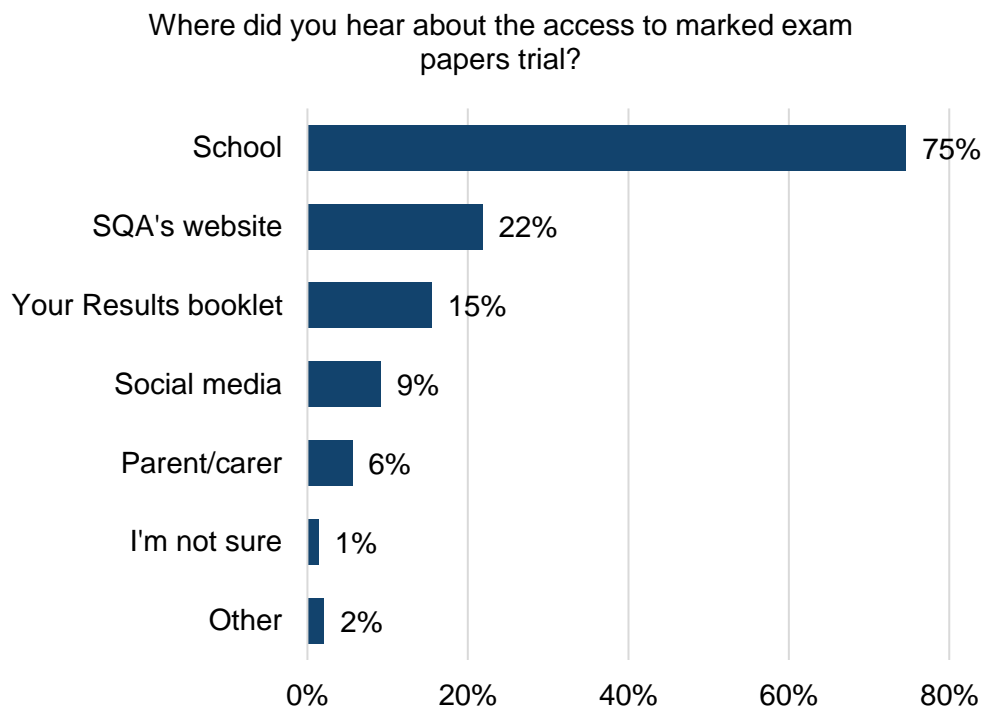
Learners were also informed that their postcode would be converted into an island code. This was done using the National Records of Scotland [postcode index and island look up](#). This was to assess whether the survey sample was representative and whether AtMEP had a different impact on island communities compared to other communities. However, the relatively low number of respondents meant that there were not enough respondents to allow for significance testing and all respondents were from mainland communities.

Communication and guidance

Learner respondents were asked where they had heard about the AtMEP trial. They could choose more than one option.

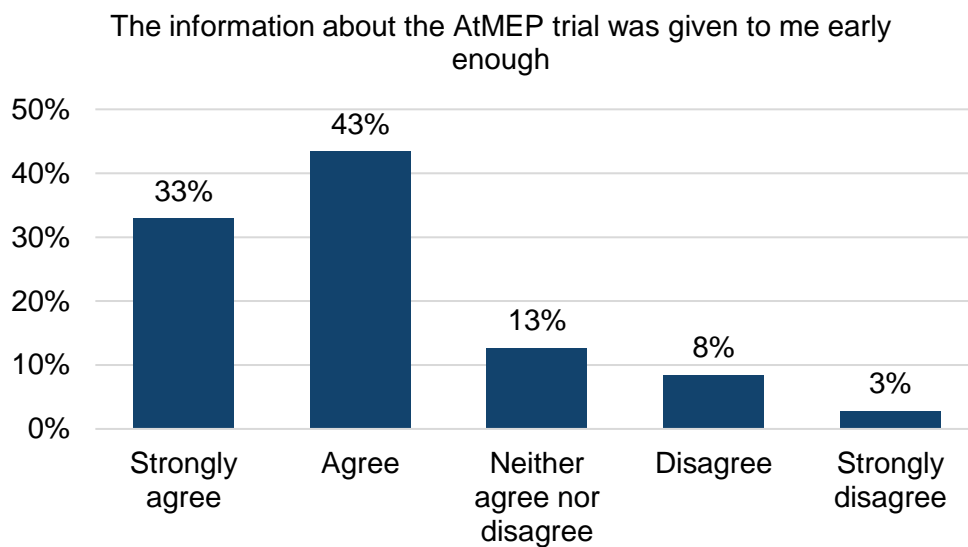
75% of respondents had heard about the trial through their school, 22% from SQA's website, 15% from the Your Results booklet, 9% from social media, 6% from a parent or carer, and 1% were not sure. Of those who chose 'other' here, two respondents had heard about the trial from friends and one from a newspaper.

Figure 42: Learners — sources of information about AtMEP



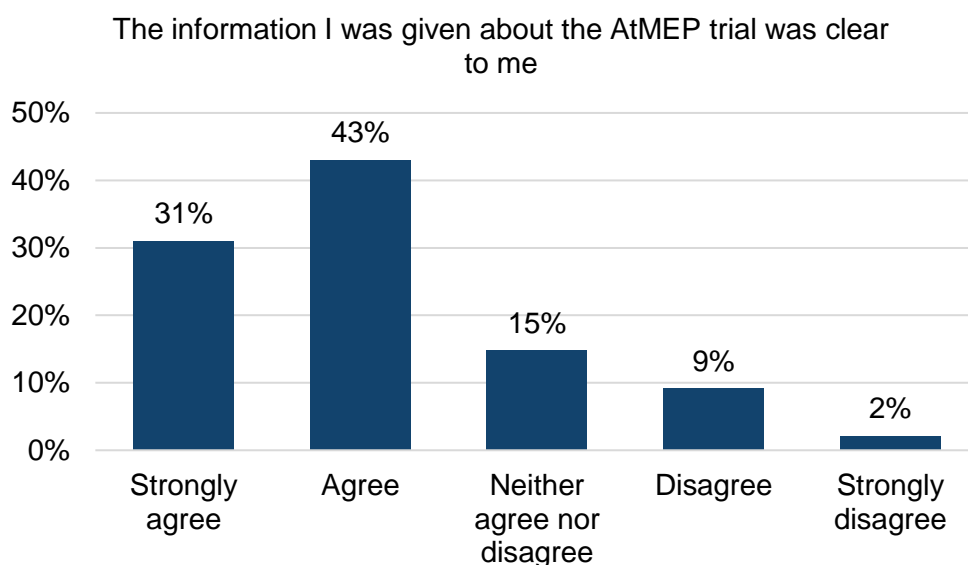
33% of respondents strongly agreed that the information about the AtMEP trial was given to them early enough; 43% agreed, 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 8% disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.0.

Figure 43: Learners — timing of information



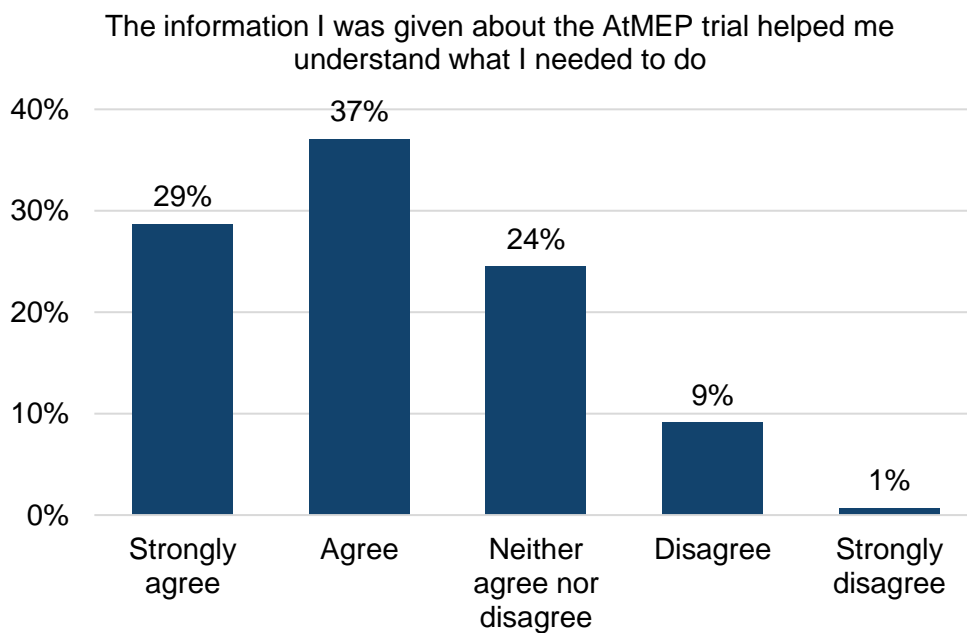
31% of respondents strongly agreed that the information they were given on the AtMEP trial was clear to them; 43% agreed, 15% neither agreed nor disagreed, 9% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.9.

Figure 44: Learners — clarity of information



29% of respondents strongly agreed that the information they were given about the AtMEP trial helped them understand what they needed to do. 37% agreed, 24% neither agreed nor disagreed, 9% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.8.

Figure 45: Learners — helpfulness of information



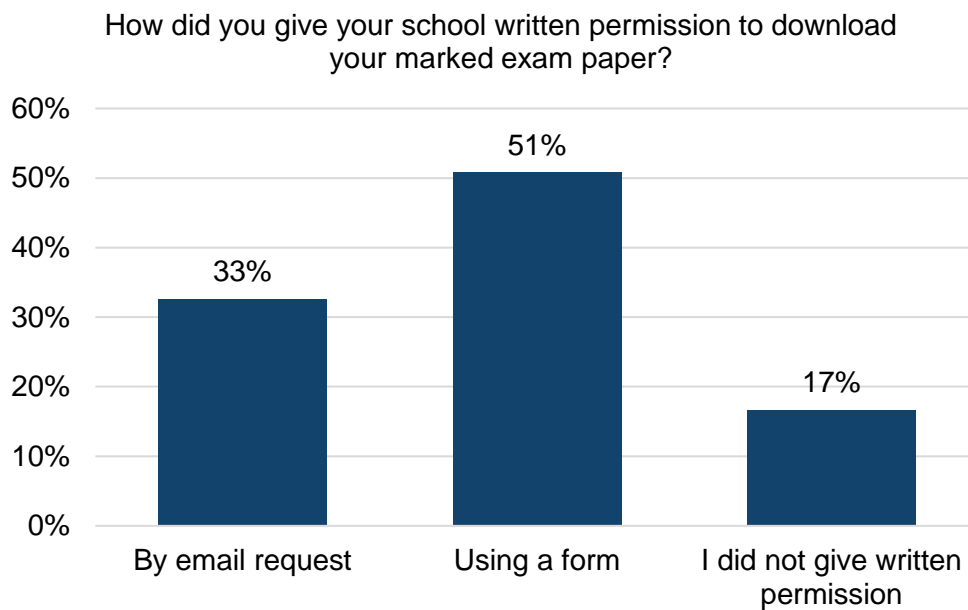
Respondents were asked if it would have been easier for them if the information about AtMEP had been available in a language other than English. 93% said no, but 7% said yes. Four respondents suggested a different language, although no language was mentioned more than once — Chinese, French, Polish, and Romanian.

Permissions

92% of respondents said it was their decision to access their marked exam paper, but 9% said it was not. These respondents were asked whose decision it was. Eight learners commented, all saying that it was their teacher’s decision.

When asked about giving their school written permission to access their marked exam paper, 51% said that they completed a form and 33% said that they submitted an email request. 17% said that they did not give written permission.

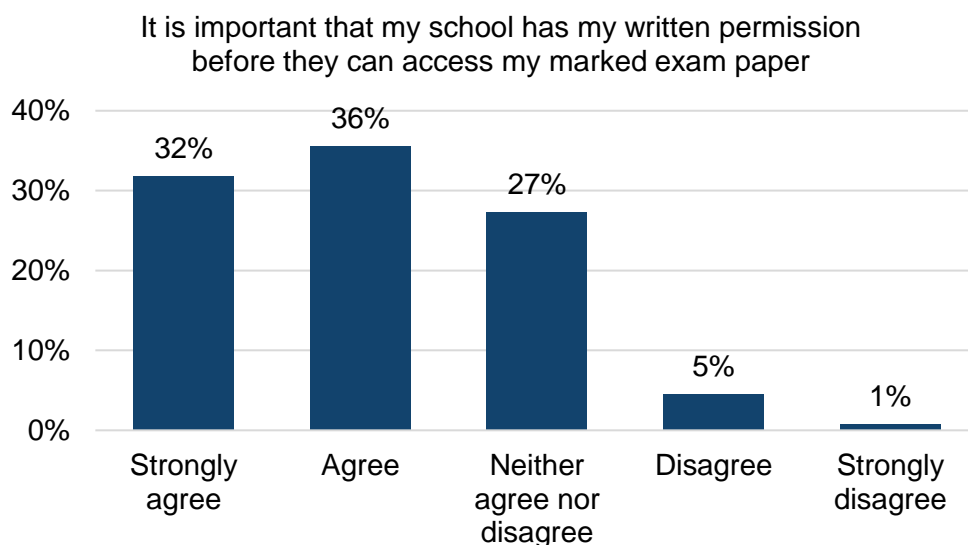
Figure 46: Learners — method of giving written permission



When asked if they had understood that their school could only share their marked exam paper with them and relevant school staff, 90% of respondents said yes and 10% said no.

32% of respondents strongly agreed that it is important that their school has their written permission before accessing their marked exam paper, 36% agreed, 27% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.9.

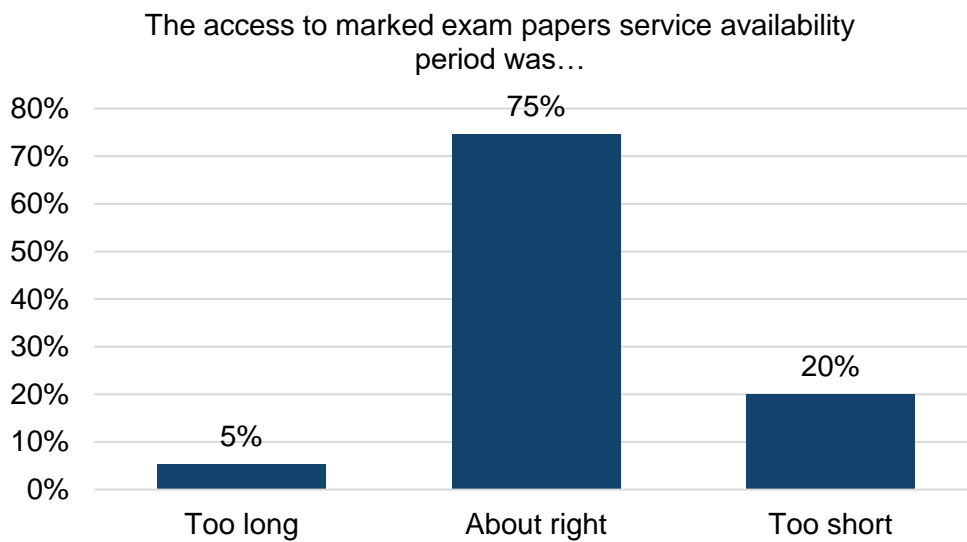
Figure 47: Learners — importance of written permission



Timing

The AtMEP service was open from 6 August until 27 September. 5% of respondents thought that this was too long, 75% about right, and 20% too short.

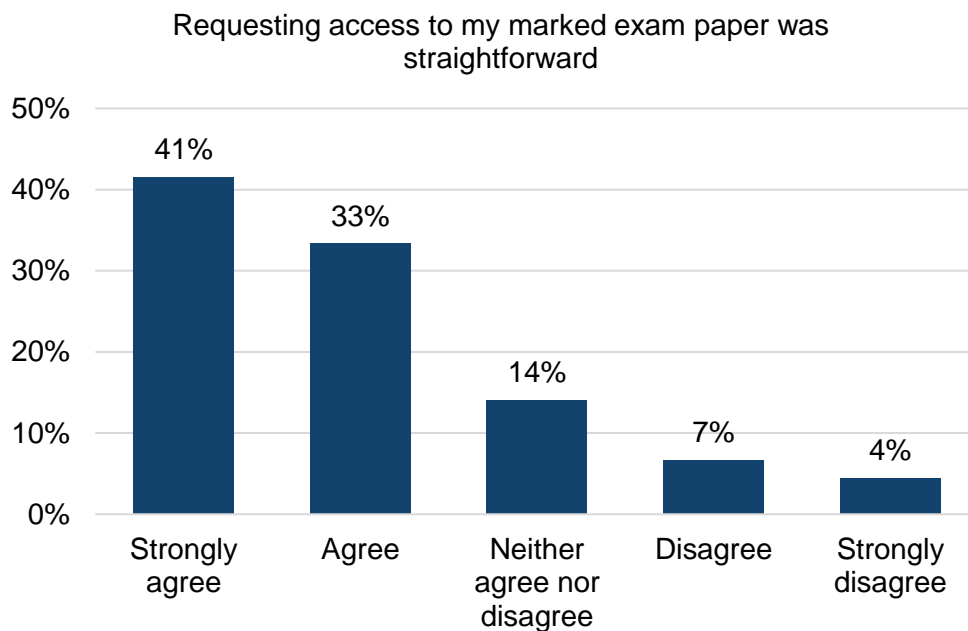
Figure 48: Learners — timing of the AtMEP service



Requesting access

41% of respondents strongly agreed that requesting access to their marked exam paper was straightforward, 33% agreed, 14% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.0.

Figure 49: Learners — straightforwardness of requesting access



Those who disagreed or strongly disagreed were asked which aspect of requesting access to their marked exam paper was not straightforward. Eleven respondents left comments.

One respondent said that they had had to contact the school several times as the school was busy with other things at the time. Similarly, one respondent suggested that their experience had not been bad, but they thought if the SQA co-ordinator had had a lot of requests to deal with, it could have been problematic. Another respondent said it was not straightforward that not all teachers could access marked exam papers.

One respondent said that their teacher did not agree with the AtMEP service, so their parent had had to contact the school. Likewise, one respondent said that they had requested their marked exam paper but had been told this was only available if there was a problem — it was not available purely out of interest.

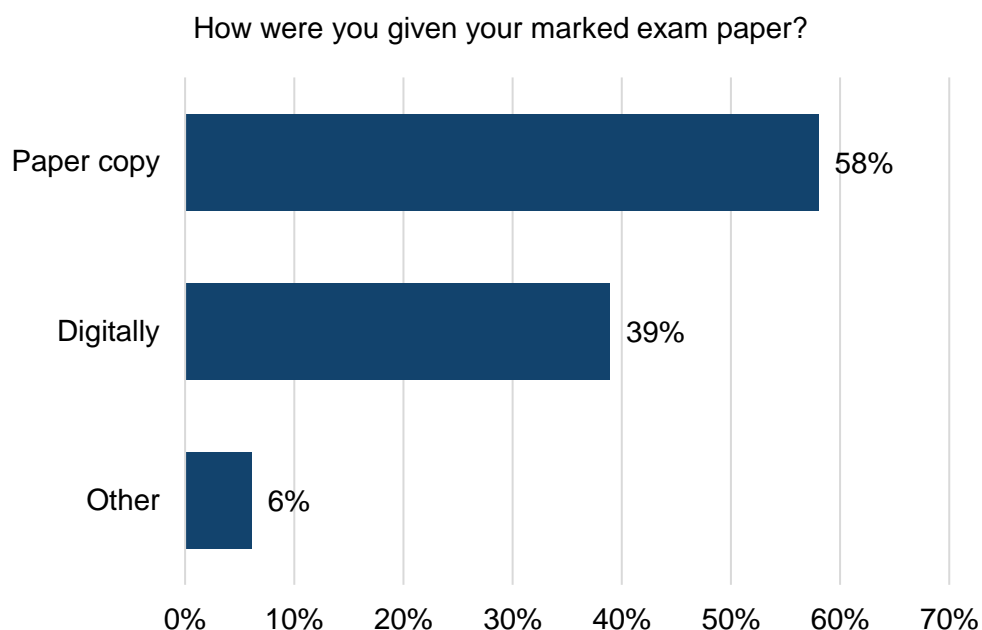
Five respondents suggested that they were not fully aware of the service or how it should work.

Accessing marked exam papers

Respondents were asked how they were given their marked exam paper. They could choose more than one.

39% of respondents were given their marked exam paper digitally and 58% in a paper copy. 6% said that they had been given their marked exam paper another way, but in comments, one said digitally, three said that they had not yet seen it, and one said that they had been talked through the marked exam paper rather than been given it.

Figure 50: Learners — method of receiving marked exam paper



Those respondents who had been given their marked exam paper digitally were then asked if they used screen reader software. Two said they did. Of these two respondents, one answered yes to the question ‘Was the screen reader you used able to read out the information on your marked exam paper?’ but one answered no.

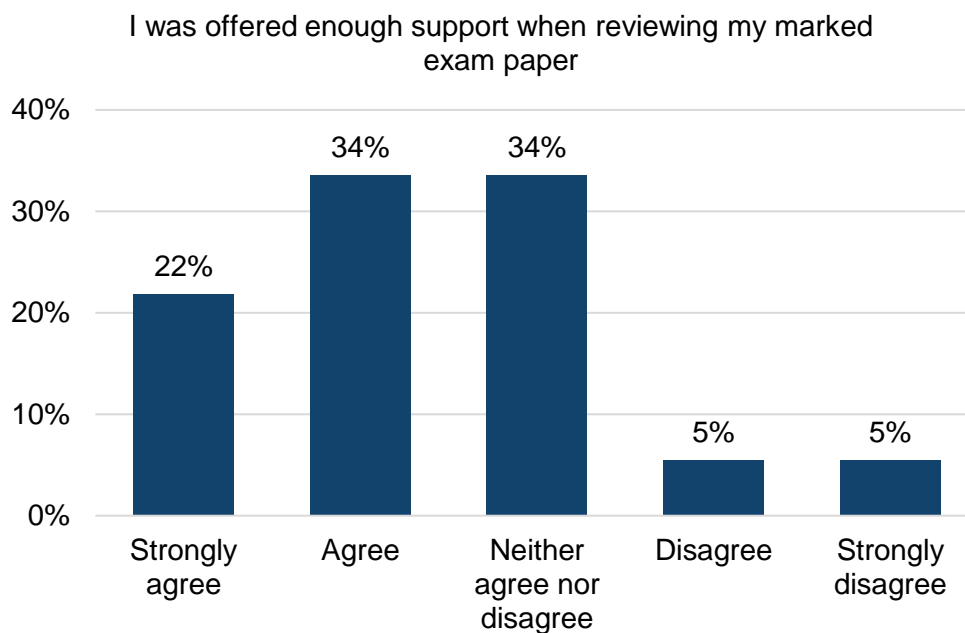
Respondents were then asked if their school had also shared the marking instructions when giving them their marked exam paper. 55% said yes and 45% said no.

Of those respondents who had seen the marking instructions, 90% answered yes to the question ‘Were the marking instructions helpful?’ while 10% answered no.

Support

22% of respondents strongly agreed that they had been offered enough support when reviewing their marked exam paper, 34% agreed, 34% neither agreed nor disagreed, 5% disagreed, and 5% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 3.6.

Figure 51: Learners — support with reviewing marked exam papers

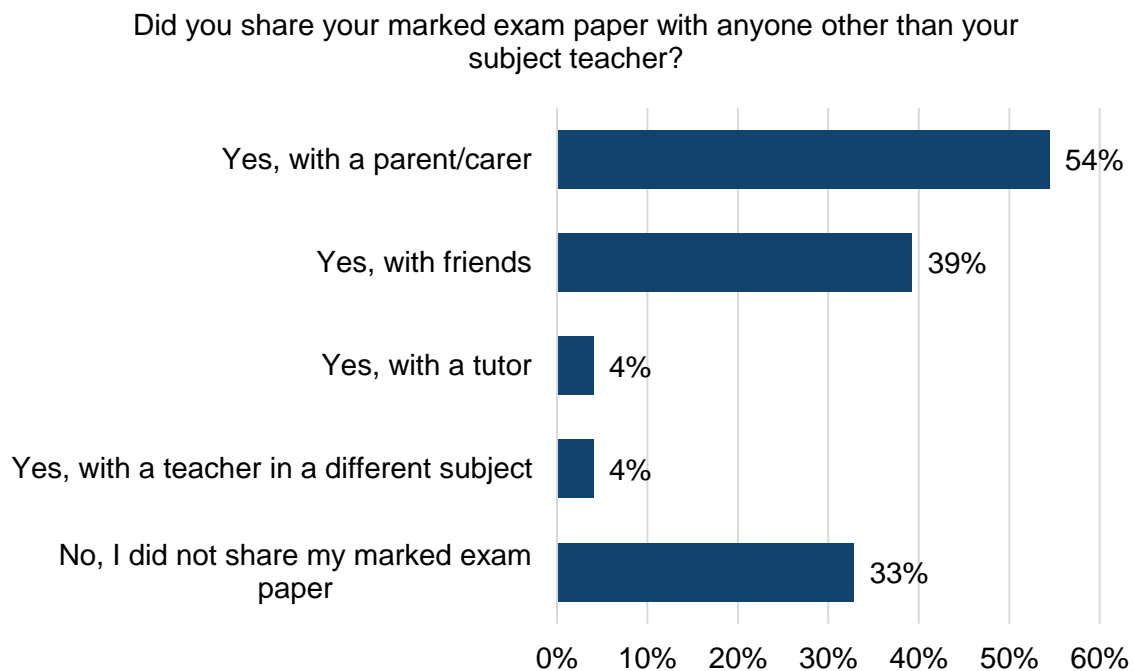


Those respondents who had disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were offered enough support were asked what support they would have liked. Nine learners commented. Most of these respondents expressed frustration that they had just been given their marked exam paper and would have instead liked the opportunity to talk it through with their teacher.

Sharing marked exam papers

Respondents were asked if they had shared their marked exam paper with anyone other than their subject teacher. They could choose more than one. 54% had shared it with a parent or carer, 39% with friends, 4% with a tutor and 4% with a teacher in a different subject. 33% of learner respondents said that they did not share their marked exam paper.

Figure 52: Learners — sharing marked exam papers



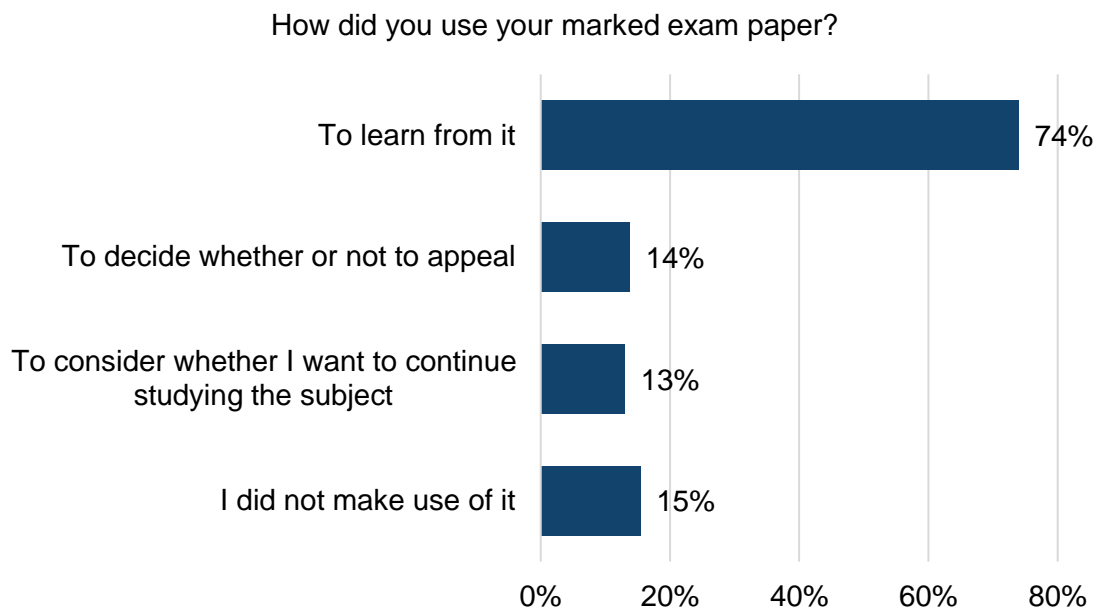
Respondents were given the opportunity to note if they had shared their marked exam paper with someone outwith the above categories. Five learners commented, but only one response (shared with SQA co-ordinator) would not fit into the above categories.

Using marked exam papers

When asked how they had used their marked exam paper (they could choose more than one), 74% of respondents said to learn from it, 14% said to decide whether or not to appeal, and 13% said to consider whether they wanted to continue studying the subject. 16% said that they did not make use of their marked exam paper.

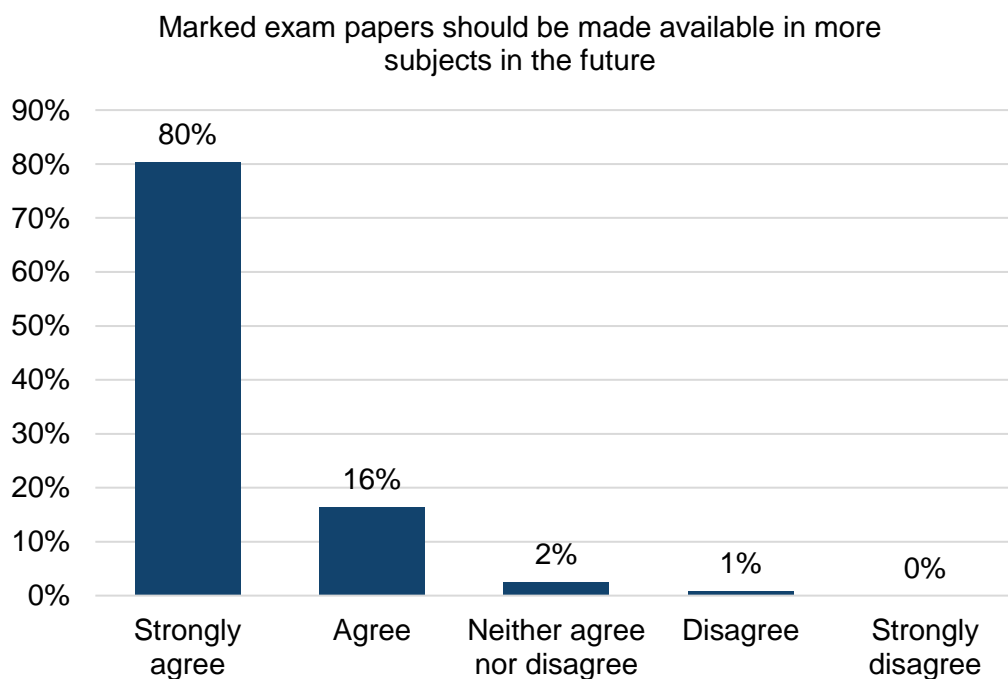
One learner commented that they had requested their marked exam paper out of curiosity and to keep as a souvenir, another commented that they wanted to see if they could have got more marks, and one stated that there was not enough information on the marked exam paper to learn anything.

Figure 53: Learners — using marked exam papers



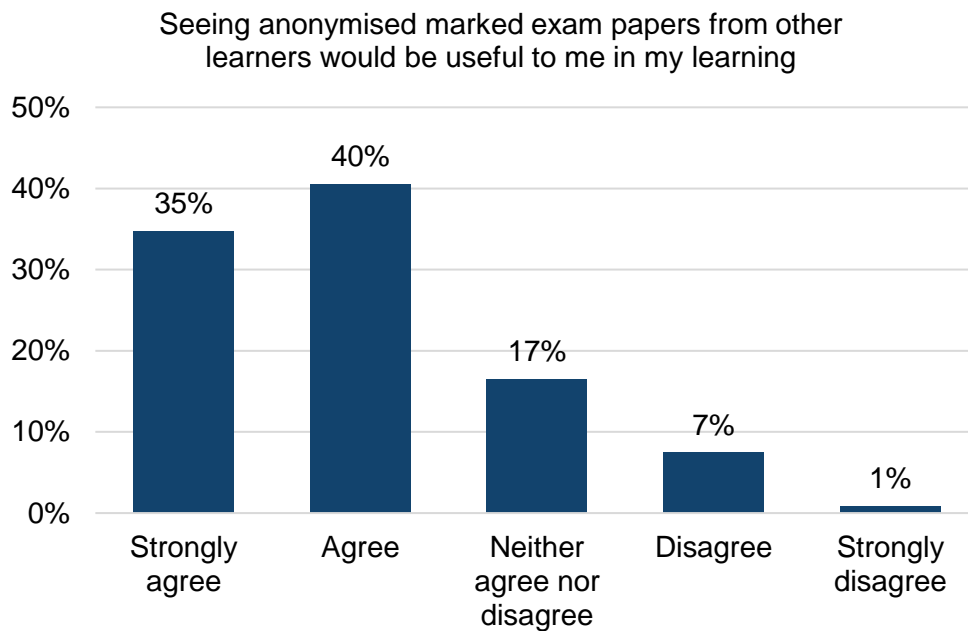
80% of respondents strongly agreed that marked exam papers should be made available in more subjects in the future; 16% agreed, 2% neither agreed nor disagreed, 1% disagreed, and 0% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.8.

Figure 54: Learners — expanding AtMEP in the future



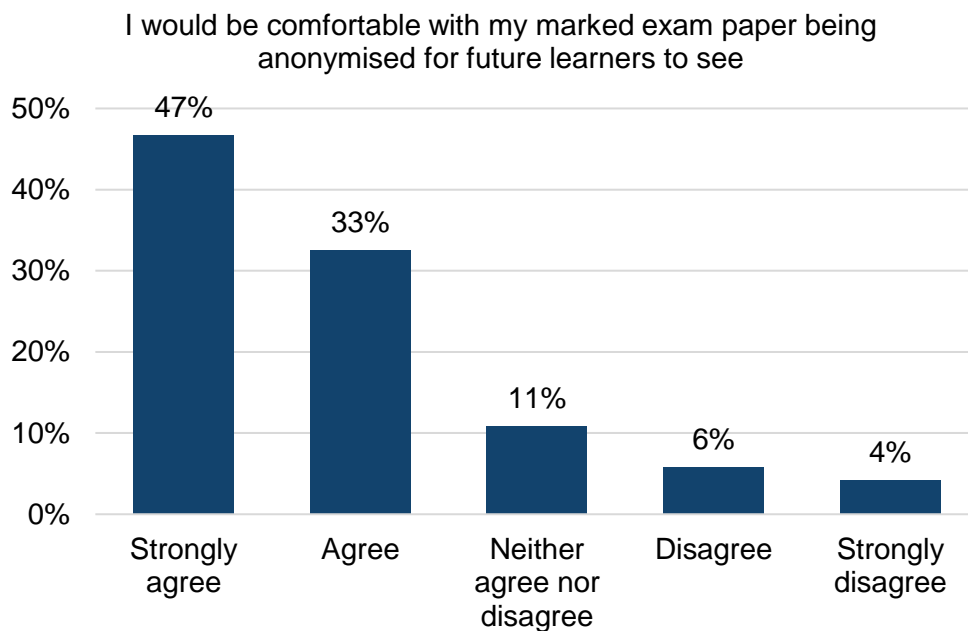
35% of respondents strongly agreed that seeing anonymised marked exam papers from other learners would be useful to them in their learning; 40% agreed, 17% neither agreed nor disagreed, 7% disagreed, and 1% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.0.

Figure 55: Learners — seeing other learners' marked exam papers



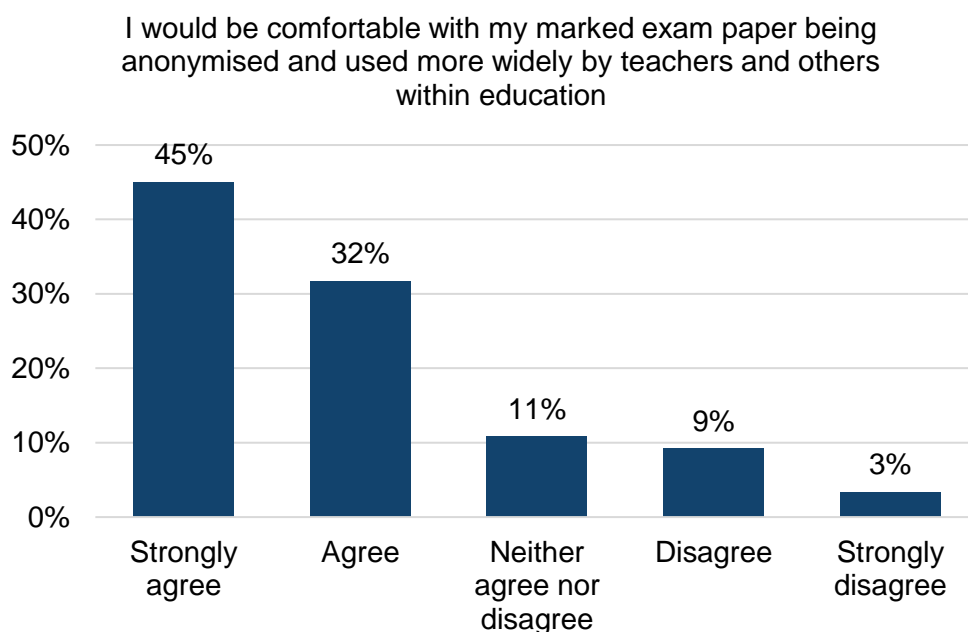
47% of respondents strongly agreed that they would be comfortable with their marked exam paper being anonymised for future learners to see; 33% agreed, 11% neither agreed nor disagreed, 6% disagreed, and 4% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.1.

Figure 56: Learners — other learners using marked exam papers



45% of respondents strongly agreed that they would be comfortable with their marked exam paper being anonymised and used more widely by teachers and others within education; 32% agreed, 11% neither agreed nor disagreed, 9% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.1.

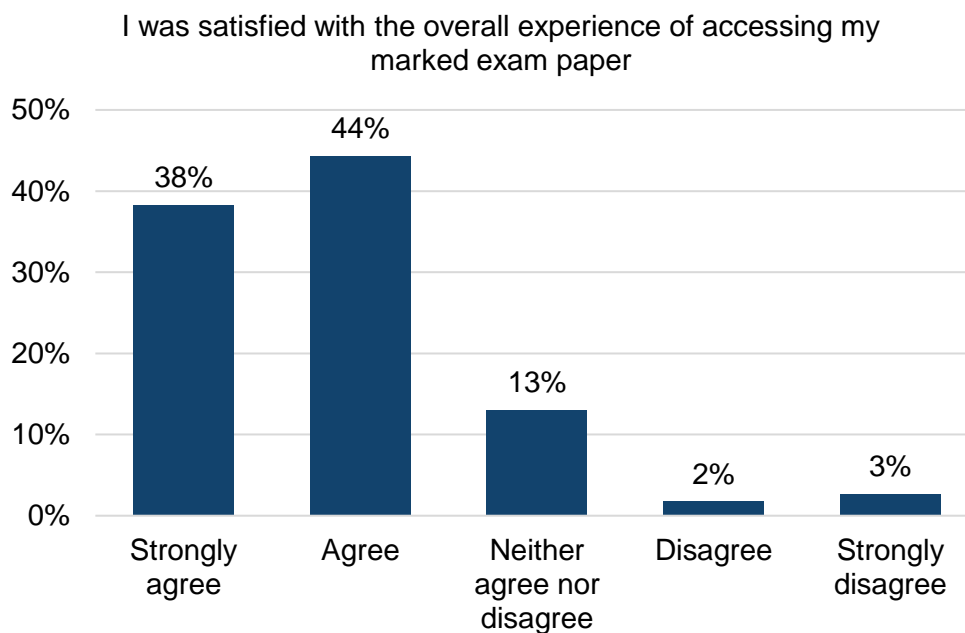
Figure 57: Learners — wider use of marked exam papers



Overall views

38% of respondents strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the overall experience of accessing their marked exam paper; 44% agreed, 13% neither agreed nor disagreed, 2% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed. The mean score for this question, where strongly agree = 5 and strongly disagree = 1, was 4.1.

Figure 58: Learners — overall satisfaction



Benefits

Respondents were asked what they thought the main benefits of AtMEP are. Eighty-eight learners commented.

The main theme, mentioned by the majority, was that AtMEP allows learners a greater understanding of their exam performance. Many learners framed this as being able to see where they had lost marks, where their strengths and weaknesses lay, and why they were awarded the grade they were.

Being able to see what parts of the course I struggled/excelled at.

To see what your strengths and weaknesses are throughout the exam.

Understanding why you got a specific grade and/or mark on a specific component.

Somewhat relatedly, almost as many comments suggested that AtMEP highlights areas where learners can develop or improve performance. Learning from mistakes, mentioned by substantial numbers of learners, was deemed particularly important for those intending to progress in the subject.

So that you can learn from your own mistakes and know where you went wrong. And use that knowledge to help you at a higher level if you are pursuing that subject area.

Additionally, several comments stated that AtMEP would be useful specifically in terms of deciding whether or not to progress in a subject.

Several comments also suggested that the main benefit of AtMEP was in helping to decide whether or not to appeal.

A few respondents each suggested that the main benefits were in helping with exam preparation or revision techniques and being able to have a souvenir or memento out of interest.

Disadvantages

Respondents were asked if there were any disadvantages to AtMEP. While there were comments from 82 learners, 46 of these just said 'no' or that they did not think that there were disadvantages.

Of the remainder, a majority suggested that the disadvantage of AtMEP was that it could be disappointing or demoralising to see the mistakes that they had made in the exam.

Many people may be disappointed with their result and may look back on their paper negatively and [it] may lower a candidate's confidence/ self-esteem.

A few respondents thought that a disadvantage was the marking or annotations not being clear or specific enough. A few also thought that AtMEP may cause confusion if teachers or learners do not understand the marking. Additionally, one learner said that the handwriting was not clear enough.

A few respondents expressed frustration that AtMEP was not available in all subjects. A range of other perceived disadvantages of AtMEP were cited by one respondent each, including pressure to share the marked exam paper with friends and family, not knowing what to do with it afterwards, the difficulty of accessing a pdf of a scanned paper, and the waste of paper if they are printed.

Improvements

Finally, respondents were asked if there were any improvements that they would suggest for the future. There were comments from 75 learners, but 24 of them said that they did not have any suggestions.

Otherwise, the most common theme, featured in the majority of comments, was that AtMEP should be expanded to more, or all, subjects. Indeed, three respondents also suggested that marked coursework should also be returned.

Several respondents thought that the marking instructions should be clearer, for example:

Explain what the marks in the marking instructions mean, for example the upside-down y.

Similarly, a few respondents suggested that the marks should be written next to the relevant question.

In other comments, several respondents thought that the returned marked exam paper should include some element of feedback or commentary. A few thought that the AtMEP service should become learner direct, and a few thought that awareness of the service should be increased.

More clear explanations of where marks are given and why.

Direct access for pupils. It was hard going through the school to get this.

Make it more known, my teacher never knew how to access the paper or how to go about getting it.

Finally, a small number of respondents made comments not directly related to learner AtMEP. One said that appeals should be more lenient, one said that more appeals feedback should be provided, and the other said that SQA should provide more access to learning materials such as past papers or anonymised marked exam papers.

Senior appointee feedback

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six senior appointees: five principal assessors (PAs) and one depute PA. All five of the subjects involved in the AtMEP trial were covered. Interviews explored participants' views on AtMEP, their experiences of the service this year, the potential benefits and drawbacks of the service, suggestions for improvements and future considerations.

Awareness and feedback

When asked about their awareness of the AtMEP trial, and their subject's part in it, senior appointees' views were mixed. While one PA thought that they found out about it too late, another said that they were aware well in advance; others were more neutral. These different views appear to reflect differences of opinion on how much notice they should have had, rather than differences in terms of the date they found out. A couple of participants mentioned getting emails from their QM in May.

No participants reported any feedback they had received on the AtMEP trial, but a couple suggested that any feedback would ordinarily be routed through the QM. A couple mentioned that relatively few marked exam papers had been downloaded, which may account for the lack of feedback.

One PA did suggest, however, that they would have liked a standardised common message on AtMEP and its purpose to ensure consistency across the different subjects. This could have been used to reassure marking teams.

Purpose and usage

In interviews, relatively little mention was given to AtMEP's role in learner decisions on appeals. One PA queried how useful AtMEP would be in informing learner decisions on appeals, particularly given gaps in knowledge about marking processes and tolerances (explored below). Another PA mentioned the low quality of work that they had seen through the appeals process and thought that this suggested that AtMEP had not been used to inform learner decisions on appeals. Similarly, one PA

said that learners and parents and carers would still request appeals, even if the marked exam papers suggested that there should not be one.

In appeals some of the work that you were seeing was so poor ... I've been kind of hoping, I suppose, that the service would stop us seeing things like that.

More commonly, participants talked about the potential that AtMEP has for practitioner CPD. There were several mentions of practitioners being able to identify areas of weakness where they may need to improve practice or materials.

Maybe [practitioners will] question why they're not getting marks and go back and ... say, 'Alright. OK. Well, maybe I haven't taught that and there's a gap. Maybe I need to go back and look at my teacher materials'.

On the other hand, one PA thought that practitioners already have all the resources they need in the form of course reports, marking instructions or Understanding Standards materials, for example.

I genuinely don't think it's going to have any impact on learning.

One participant thought that, even if AtMEP does not impact on appeals, teaching and learning, or assessment standards, it is nevertheless worthwhile in principle to demonstrate SQA's commitment to openness and transparency.

Marking

Participants were asked if they thought that, in the context of AtMEP, practitioners and learners would benefit from more information and guidance on marking practices such as marking tolerances and grade boundaries. While in general participants felt that transparency about marking practices is a good thing, they acknowledged that there are complexities in the marking process that may be challenging for practitioners and learners, particularly, to grasp.

Practitioners would need to understand ... what questions were taken into account at grade boundary to ... explain why the grade boundary was lowered.

I think without that knowledge it's difficult to look at a marked paper and understand it.

In terms of more information... It's a really complex marking process, particularly with certain questions. You know, if there's a right or wrong answer like in a measuring question, then that's very easy. But if it is more subjective and there are multiple answers that are not provided in the marking instruction, then that's more complex and you really wouldn't understand that unless you were a marker.

One participant highlighted the challenges of explaining marking tolerances and grade boundaries across different subjects — if these are different, then will practitioners and learners perceive some subjects to be more difficult than others? Furthermore, one PA thought this sort of information may just cause confusion.

I'm not convinced everybody really needs to know. You know, it's a part of a procedure that is there to ensure that there is a fairness and equality for candidates across all subjects.

In terms of AtMEP's impact on the marking team and marking itself, most participants suggested that this was minimal. Broadly, they expressed confidence in existing procedures, quality assurance, and the skills of the marking team that resulted in a feeling that AtMEP would not unduly affect or worry markers.

I didn't see any nervousness from any member of my team, and I'd like to think that's because of how the event was run and how the marking instructions were documented ... if a candidate got to see their script, they would not know whom the marker had been. It would just be ticks and crosses.

However, one PA suggested that the trial had made their markers, if not stressed, then more aware of their marking. The potential of increased scrutiny elicited some nervousness, and the senior appointees had had to reassure markers of their anonymity.

'Yes, people will see your marking, but they won't know it was you that marked it.' So that did alleviate some of that stress for people, I think.

This led to discussions from a couple of participants about the complexities, including the subjectivity, of some marking and the issues noted earlier that AtMEP means that marked exam papers will potentially be accessed by those who have an incomplete understanding of marking processes. This could open SQA and markers up to widespread criticism, justified or otherwise.

It can be quite demoralising when you're just faced with criticism all of the time. And you're trying to do a good job, and an impartial job ... I mean, one of the comments on a Facebook page recently was 'The principal assessor clearly doesn't like children'.

I think they [teachers] don't understand the marking process. They don't understand the procedures that we go through at SQA, they don't understand, you know, things like tolerances... But I just feel it's always very negative and there's no support there. And I think that that's probably going to be exacerbated now that they've had access to exam scripts.

On a related note, another participant questioned whether in future AtMEP would lead to increased workload in terms of answering specific queries or criticisms about marking.

Future considerations

When asked about improvements to the service, one participant suggested that they would like to have been more involved in choosing the most useful marked exam papers to be released. This revealed a misunderstanding of the process, where the participant was focused on AtMEP's role in exemplification and practitioner CPD rather than the fact that any marked exam paper could be accessed on request from the learner.

Indeed, a major theme to come through in discussions, mentioned earlier, was AtMEP's potential as a compelling tool for improving teaching and learning. Several participants suggested that this is where future benefits lie, as a resource complementary to, but perhaps more powerful than, Understanding Standards. One

PA suggested that the learner permission model was not compatible with AtMEP's foremost benefits, which are to do with CPD.

If teachers could access their own scripts and see how their own candidates' work had been marked, that has huge gains.

PAs did not seem to feel as strongly about AtMEP having benefits for learners, although some PAs did think that learners would find their marked exam papers useful or interesting, and argued that the service is important for transparency. Again, mention of AtMEP's role in informing learner decisions on appeals was relatively limited, although one participant would like the service to be open for longer so that when appeals outcomes are released, learners and practitioners can go back and understand the reasons for these.

On potential drawbacks, the main theme, covered earlier, was around marking scrutiny and the issues that this could cause if practitioners and learners do not fully understand marking processes.

Confusion around how the marks were applied. These sorts of things. Like, we know that 'explain' responses are not done or responded to particularly well. And we know from social media that there seems to be some confusion around the expectation of this despite the fact that a good number of Understanding Standards resources help to explain what 'explain' means.

Moreover, some participants mentioned concerns around workload, for both practitioners and the marking team, particularly if the service were to be scaled up.

Certainly, within schools it's a workload issue to facilitate learners and staff accessing their papers.

Only 20% are being downloaded this year. I wonder how it's going to work as people get more familiar with it and, you know, become bolder, I suppose, and question everything that we do, I think it's going to be ... a workload issue there.

Finally, in thinking about the future, a couple of participants were not completely supportive of the further implementation of AtMEP and were unconvinced of its benefits or thought that drawbacks outweigh any benefits.

Qualification Development feedback

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with QMs from four of the five subjects involved in the 2024 AtMEP trial. Interviews explored QMs' broad views on AtMEP, the potential benefits and drawbacks of the service, suggestions for improvements and future considerations. QMs were also asked about any AtMEP-related feedback they had received from appointees or centres.

Awareness and feedback

Three of the QMs felt that they had enough awareness of the AtMEP trial and how it would operate early enough. However, one felt that they should have been more involved in the project team, both to gain a fuller understanding of the trial and to feed back their own concerns. Moreover, while most of the QMs thought that they (and their appointees) understood the AtMEP process, a couple mentioned that this was not necessarily true for centres, with the perception that a lot of dense guidance documentation was sent out to centres quite late.

However, in general, the participants were surprised by the limited number of queries on AtMEP (if any) that they received from appointees or centres. Reasons suggested for this low level of feedback included the relatively low number of AtMEP downloads, the user-friendly nature of SQA Connect, and that there were no issues with marking to query.

I've not had a single email about it.

The system is fairly straightforward to use... so I don't think there's much to be said.

My hope is that the marking just looked very straightforward and there was very little to say about it.

One QM did say that they would have liked to respond to the one query (on marking and grade boundary processes) that they received from a centre but did not because AtMEP guidance had suggested SQA would not enter into correspondence.

On subjects selected for the trial, there were some concerns raised about the relevance of a low uptake subject such as Advanced Higher Statistics in terms of further scalability, or the relevance of the question paper used in National 5 and Higher Music to other more subjective subjects. On a related note, both the QM for Statistics and the QM for Media reported feedback from Mathematics and English appointees, respectively, querying the potential roll out of AtMEP to those subjects.

Purpose

The interviews demonstrated a lack of clarity around the purpose of AtMEP.

For me, it's still not totally clear what the purpose is.

While AtMEP's main intended purpose is to support learner decisions on appeals, some QMs thought that it is better suited to other purposes. While there were comments that AtMEP could play a part in appeals, these comments were relatively few, and these were coupled with concerns about how accessible or useful practitioners and learners, particularly, would find annotations and marking instructions.

There was more support for the notion that AtMEP increases transparency more broadly. Interviewees suggested that a benefit of AtMEP would be increased practitioner and learner understanding of SQA's marking processes. Increasing openness was seen as important in light of the reform agenda.

I think probably the benefit is openness and us being explicit in the way it's marked and candidates being able to see that.

I can see the desire to be able to offer the service ... fits with a transparency agenda... And I think that's positive.

The most prevalent theme in terms of the purpose and benefits of AtMEP, however, was its potential to provide CPD to practitioners. Participants suggested that AtMEP could have a positive effect as centres could examine their areas of relative strength and weakness and then target the appropriate topics. They argued that AtMEP could enable practitioners to assess whether they needed to change the focus of their

teaching practice or approach in a way that access to Understanding Standards materials could not.

It's about teachers and lecturers and them being able to see how their preparation for assessment has played out in the exams themselves.

It has the potential to improve teaching learning and practices.

It may influence how they teach certain topics.

Understanding Standards ... has a different slant. When it's a text that you've taught and it's your students and you know what you expect them to be able to do on the day... seeing what they actually do with the material you've taught them in the classroom, I think it'd be quite enlightening.

Because participants tended to think the main benefit of AtMEP was its CPD potential, there were some apprehensions expressed around the learner permission model. Based on their own perceptions and conversations with appointees, a couple of QMs thought that a learner direct model does not lend itself to practitioner benefits. There were reports of too few learners asking to access their marked exam paper or of centres struggling to contact learners for permission.

Workload

Related to the learner permission model, there were concerns about the effect of AtMEP on practitioner workload. Participants suggested that some centres, or learners, would expect practitioners to go through each downloaded marked exam paper in detail. Even if this was not a requirement, a couple of participants thought that it would be unrealistic to expect there to be no further demands on practitioners.

It's hard to see that there wouldn't be an impact on workload.

If it is available... is there then an ask on teachers to do that kind of work, you know to look across the cohort and identify strengths and weaknesses? ...

That's not a trivial task for anybody to undertake... It's not something that teachers currently have to do so it would have to be seen as additional work.

Indeed, a couple of participants mentioned the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS)'s opposition to the service and the possible effect that this would have.

Also related to workload, a couple of QMs mentioned that the beginning of term is a particularly busy time for centres, one where SQA places a lot of demands on them, particularly in terms of appeals. They questioned whether the relatively short AtMEP availability window was appropriate, although this relates back to the main purpose of the service and its role in appeals.

Participants also raised concerns about internal workload resource implications, particularly if the AtMEP service were to be scaled up. They raised perceived issues around subjects with several components, subjects that are marked from paper, high uptake subjects, coursework components, and dealing with queries arising from AtMEP.

At what stage would all subjects and all components be available to the service? I think that's another that has huge resource implication for SQA.

Workload for my team does concern me when I think about the much larger uptake subjects with multiple components and, how as an organisation we would communicate or deal with queries that arise from teachers looking at exam scripts?

I think as an organisation, we would need a clear policy on what we were willing to enter into dialogue with off of the back of teachers looking at scripts. Because schools ask for all sorts of things that we cannot resource.

Marking

The most common area of concern for QMs in relation to AtMEP was the perceived risks associated with a lack of understanding of marking processes.

For instance, participants highlighted the quality of marking and the robustness of quality assurance processes but acknowledged that errors do nevertheless occur. It was suggested that this could have a reputational impact on the organisation.

Clearly the marking is not 100% accurate, it's just the nature of it.

You're going to find a couple in there that have probably not been marked to standard and I think that is a risk that it then undermines the marking of all the others which, to be honest, is really good.

The vast majority of teachers trust our approach to marking and the external assessment and don't know if access to scripts and people maybe not understanding the marking... maybe muddled that trust a little bit.

One QM suggested that the knowledge that a marked exam paper might be downloaded may focus markers to ensure that their annotations were all correct. Another thought that SQA would need to be clear that individual markers would not be held accountable for any marking errors. Nonetheless, none of the participants thought that subjects being part of AtMEP in the future would affect the recruitment of markers or how appointees approach marking.

There were also concerns around the grade boundary processes, marking instructions and use of marking tolerances. All of the participants expressed at least some concern that the understanding of these outwith SQA or its appointees is extremely limited. For example, an appeal that is not successful because of a marking tolerance may cause an issue if the centre does not understand this.

My slight concern is if centres do look at papers and they are up to speed enough on standards to know that something hasn't been marked properly and they've been through appeals and the grade didn't change. I mean, what do they do with that afterwards? I think we would have to really consider the level of detail that we give about our marking system's tolerances and how marking reviews work in order for centres to really understand.

If we are saying we're providing access to these scripts and the marking instructions to inform appeals, we're not telling them about marking tolerances.

Moreover, there were suggestions that it is unfair to expect practitioners and particularly learners to be able to interpret marking instructions intended for marker

training, or to know that grade boundaries may have already been adjusted to account for issues that have arisen earlier in the process.

The marking instructions are not written as exemplar answers. They're written to train markers. So, it's like assuming degree level knowledge and subject specialism. So, to say to an N5 candidate, 'There you go, there's the MIs' I think is almost a wee bit unfair ... to expect them to be able to interpret that.

Liaison Team feedback

A focus group was held with nine liaison managers. The group explored the feedback that they had received from centres and local authorities on different aspects of the AtMEP model and considered potential improvements for any future service.

Communication and guidance

Participants expressed some concern about the perceived lateness of AtMEP guidance being issued. On the whole, centres were somewhat anxious about the trial, and liaison managers had to reassure them without the agreed guidance and FAQs being available. Some felt that they could not fully answer queries. Having said that, they felt that the fact that it was a trial, and that this could be re-iterated to centres, was helpful.

They weren't sure what they were dealing with and ... [it] felt a bit like I wasn't able to answer their queries.

[It] was a bit of an issue, a slight difficulty, but we got by it with 'it's a trial'.

Despite centres' nervousness before the summer, the Liaison Team did not think that AtMEP significantly affected their own workload. However, a couple of participants suggested that discussions with centres and local authorities about it took up a substantial amount of time and possibly distracted from other issues that schools could have benefitted from discussing.

Purpose and usage

Focus group participants reported a lack of clarity around the purpose of AtMEP. Although primarily described as a service to support learner decisions on appeals, there was a sense that, early on, SQA had promoted it as being good for CPD. This, however, was not reflected in the guidance which said that the service had to be learner led.

My biggest issue that came up through my centres was the lack of clarity around whether teachers could download it for their own purposes without the learners wanting it. And, therefore, I think we need to be clearer in our own minds and with centres about the purpose of it.

Liaison managers reported disappointment from some centres that they could not use marked exam papers in a way which they felt would be most useful to them. Centres thought that AtMEP could be a helpful resource, and some were, before the summer, excited by its potential benefits in terms of CPD. They were therefore disappointed when they did not or could not get learner permission to access marked exam papers.

A couple of participants noted that centres argued that if the AtMEP model were to remain learner led or based on learner permission, then they should not be involved at all.

A lot of pushback on having to [get learner permission] at all. You know, 'if it's really just for the benefit of the learners, why involve us at all? It's more workload'.

'Look, if this is a learner led service, cut us out of it' is very much the message I'm getting.

Other liaison managers noted that some of their centres suggested that, if the AtMEP model were to remain the same next year, they would push to get blanket permission from learners in June.

Some participants also noted that they thought that some centres nevertheless downloaded marked exam papers for a whole cohort anyway or that some did not ask questions that they did not want to hear the answers to.

There was the issue that those that did come back and ask the question about the teacher seeing [scripts] ... were told no it wasn't allowed ... and that the request had to come from the learner ... So it was a real mixed economy depending on what they asked, when they asked, and whether they just did their own interpretation.

CPD aside, only one liaison manager had direct reports from two centres about using the service to inform learner decisions on appeals; in both cases, this was to advise a learner not to appeal. Otherwise, the impression was that learners wanted to access their marked exam paper purely out of interest.

On a related note, one participant thought that, if the main usage of AtMEP was not to inform learner decisions on appeals, but for learner interest or practitioner CPD, then SQA should look at when the service is open, and possibly leave it open for longer.

Workload

Somewhat related to learner permissions, centre workload issues were those that came up the most in the focus group discussion. Concerns about workload dominated Liaison Team discussions with centres and local authorities before the summer. This included the administration of getting written learner permission, downloading marked exam papers, and potentially practitioners needing to go through papers with learners.

Moreover, apprehensions were associated not just with the direct impact of the AtMEP service but also the whole range of other demands that SQA places on centres early in the school year, including appeals.

I did get – from just about everybody – workload concerns.

Many of my centres talked about workloads.

I think every group I've spoken to were concerned about workload. I think also it's the start of the term as well.

However, several liaison managers reported that, after the AtMEP service opened, it was clear that centres' fears about workload were not borne out.

Everybody calmed down after the service actually opened. It felt a bit like a bit of an anti-climax. I think they were all expecting to be rushed off their feet.

They were very, very concerned ... but one of them has been back ... to say their worries didn't actually come to fruition. They didn't have as many requests as they actually felt.

Having said that, a couple of focus group participants attributed this to the fact that some centres had not advertised the service to learners at all. Indeed, one local authority took this decision at an authority level.

A lot of my centres were quite proud and happy to tell me that we are not actively promoting this. 'We've got far too much on the go at the moment. If they come to us, that's fine, but we are not actively going out and promoting this'.

I had one local authority that didn't promote it at all. And made a conscious decision to do so. They had a meeting with co-ordinators prior to the summer.

Therefore, anxieties about centre workload have not been wholly alleviated and remain a concern, particularly if AtMEP is scaled up to include more subjects.

Future considerations

While some participants thought that workload issues would inhibit the scalability of AtMEP (although only one participant reported feedback from a centre asking SQA to fully withdraw the service), others suggested that it was not feasible for SQA to allow access to some marked exam papers and not others. A number had been asked why marked exam papers in other subjects were not available.

Many of my centres talked about workloads. If it was opened up...I think 'can of worms' was the expression used by at least one of them.

I'm not saying that expanding the trial wouldn't generate a lot of concern ... I just don't think we can give a reasonable answer to why are we limiting the subjects.

I had a number of centres who said, 'Well, I'm not interested in Geography. Can I get this subject? Can I get that subject?'

One participant thought that if more subjective subjects were included, it may open up more challenge or questions from centres. Furthermore, participants felt that increased scrutiny of marked exam papers may place unwelcome focus on teacher judgement or may discourage practitioners from becoming markers.

If a teacher looks at a paper ... and suggests that a candidate should go for an appeal and then the appeal isn't given, then they feel that comes back to the teacher in terms of judgement.

A few of my local authorities came back with ... it exposes markers to a level that maybe markers don't want to be exposed at ... It puts a marker under a degree of scrutiny and I got quite a bit of feedback, actually, that a number of markers would maybe reconsider their position if this was expanded out.

A couple of liaison managers also suggested that centres would be interested in the return of marked coursework, rather than just marked exam papers, particularly in subjects where coursework components make up a large proportion of the final mark. They suggested that it is often in these components that centres would like further support.

Finally, one participant brought up the concerns about [Higher History marking](#) this year. Would learners and practitioners having access to marked History exam papers have alleviated or exacerbated concerns around the perceived marking issues?

Data analysis

Caveats

When considering AtMEP data analysis, there are several issues to keep in mind.

- We do not know if or how the downloaded marked exam paper was used. This includes whether it was used in the decision to submit an appeal (or not).
- We do not know if individual centres notified learners about the option to download their marked exam paper.
- We do not know if learners were given access to their marked exam paper, even if the centre downloaded it.

Downloads

The total number of marked exam papers downloaded through the AtMEP service was 10,363. However, this number includes where marked exam papers were downloaded more than once and where separate Geography and Statistics components were downloaded. Once these duplicates are removed, the total number of unique course downloads was 7,256. The unique course downloads figure is used in the analyses below.

The overall proportion of available marked exam papers downloaded was 17.3%.

Table 5: Downloads by subject and level

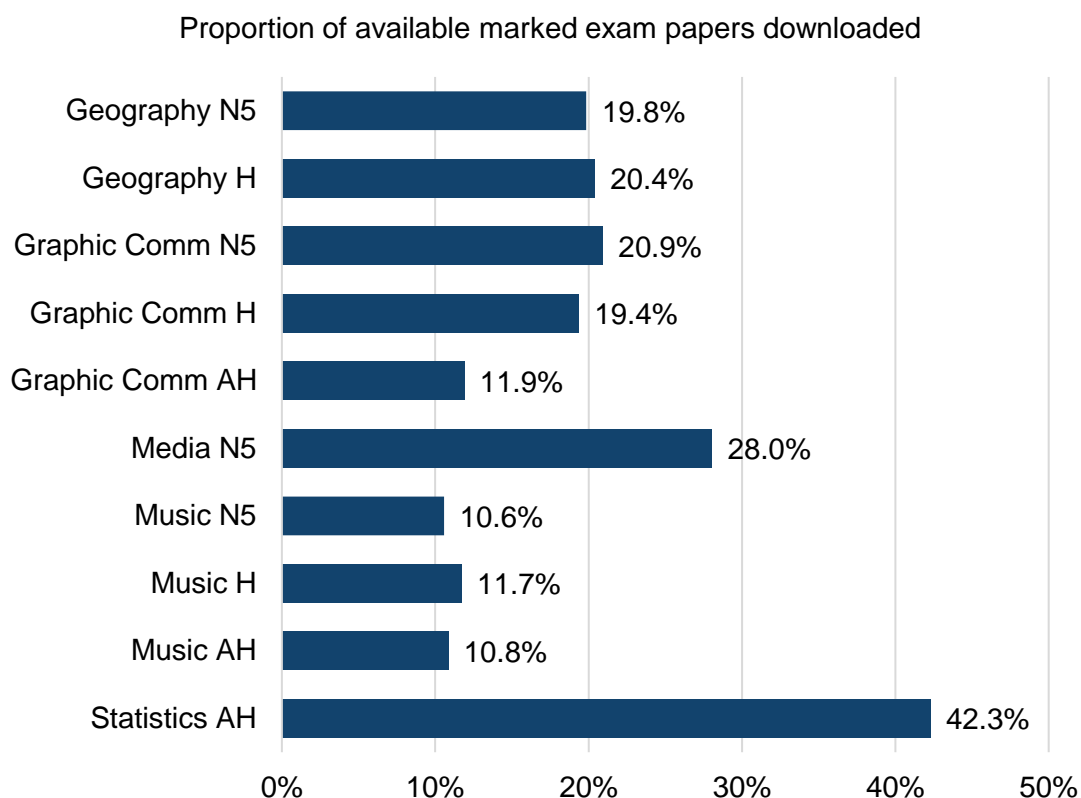
Subject	Level	Total available MEPs	Number of downloads	Proportion downloaded
Geography	National 5	9,815	1,948	19.8%
Geography	Higher	7,545	1,539	20.4%
Graphic Comm	National 5	5,127	1,073	20.9%
Graphic Comm	Higher	3,173	614	19.4%
Graphic Comm	Adv Higher	328	39	11.9%
Media	National 5	1,341	376	28.0%

Subject	Level	Total available MEPs	Number of downloads	Proportion downloaded
Music	National 5	7,654	810	10.6%
Music	Higher	5,164	605	11.7%
Music	Adv Higher	1,743	189	10.8%
Statistics	Adv Higher	149	63	42.3%
Total		42,039	7,256	17.3%

Note that the total available marked exam papers number in the table above may differ slightly from total entries (used in other tables in this analysis). A small number of marked exam papers were not available for download due to exceptions.

The chart below shows download rates ranged from 10.6% of National 5 Music marked exam papers to 42.3% of Advanced Higher Statistics marked exam papers.

Figure 59: Downloads by subject and level



Downloads by grade

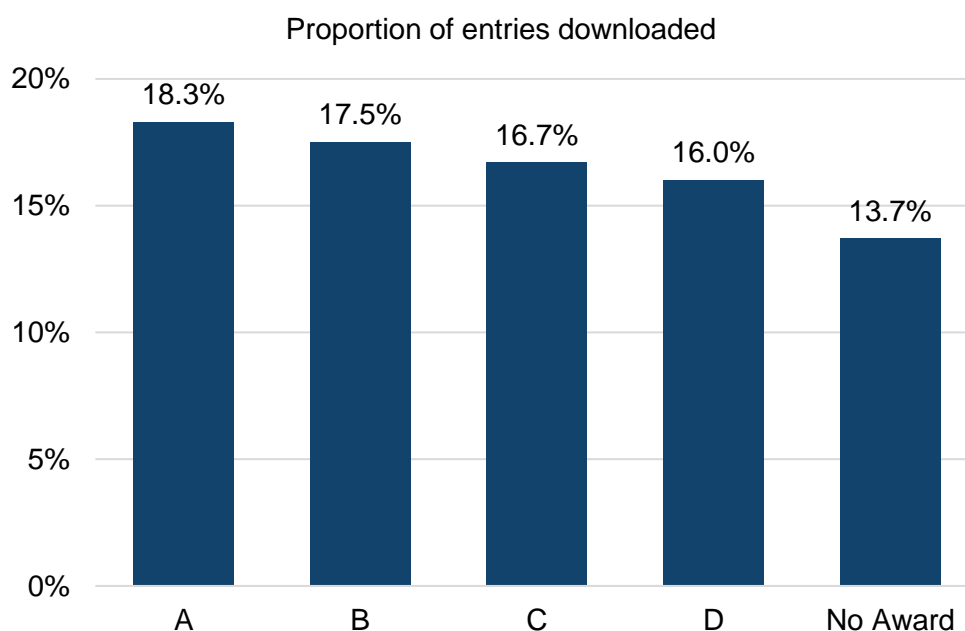
The highest number of marked exam paper downloads was for papers that had been awarded an A grade.

Table 6: Downloads by grade

Grade	Number of downloads	Proportion of entries
A	2,898	18.3%
B	1,705	17.5%
C	1,342	16.7%
D	836	16.0%
No Award	474	13.7%

18.3% of those who had been awarded an A grade downloaded their marked exam paper. This proportion decreased for other grades from B to No Award.

Figure 60: Downloads by grade



Downloads by SIMD

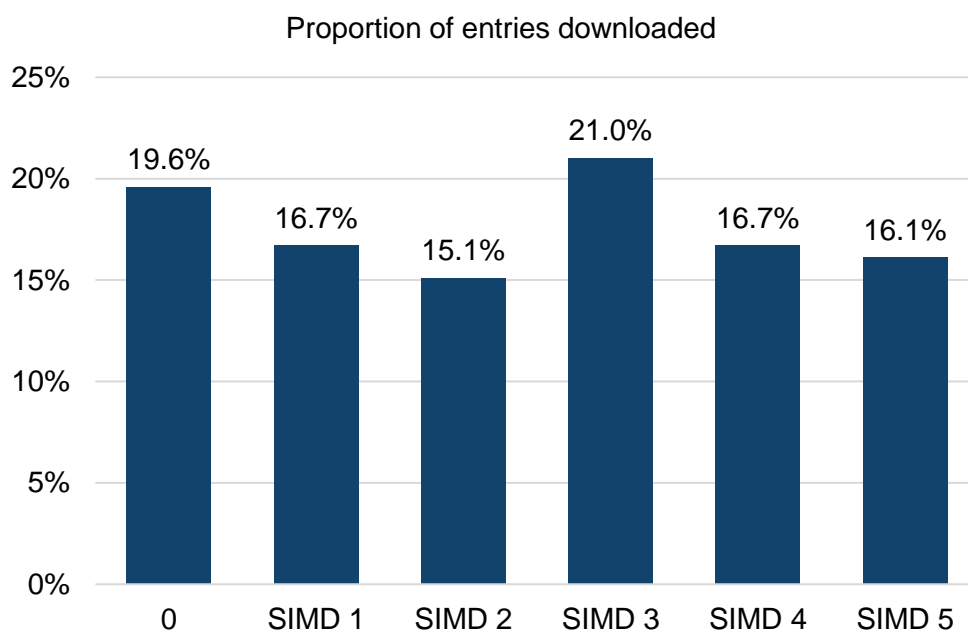
The table below shows marked exam paper downloads by learner SIMD quintile. 0 is used when an SIMD quintile could not be allocated to the record.

Table 7: Downloads by SIMD quintile

SIMD quintile	Number of downloads	Proportion of entries
0	169	19.6%
1	1,040	16.7%
2	997	15.1%
3	1,642	21.0%
4	1,630	16.7%
5	1,778	16.1%

There is no discernible pattern here, with 21% of those learners with postcodes in SIMD quintile 3 downloading their marked exam paper compared to 15.1% of those from SIMD quintile 2.

Figure 61: Downloads by learner SIMD quintile



Downloads by centre type

Independent schools made more use of the AtMEP service than education authority schools: 28.8% of independent school marked exam papers were downloaded compared to 16.4% of education authority school marked exam papers.

Table 8: Downloads by centre type

Centre type	Number of downloads	Proportion of entries
Education authority school	6,537	16.4%
Independent school	719	28.8%

Downloads by education authority

The table below shows the number of downloads by local authority. Note that downloads by independent schools are excluded.

The highest numbers of downloads were from Glasgow (832) and Edinburgh (648), but the highest proportions were from Orkney Islands (45.8% of entries) and South Ayrshire (43.8% of entries). Midlothian only had 11 downloads (1.9% of entries).

Table 9: Downloads by education authority

Education authority	Number of downloads	Proportion of entries
Orkney Islands	71	45.8%
South Ayrshire	420	43.8%
Argyll and Bute	247	42.2%
Falkirk	445	37.4%
Shetland Islands	81	32.0%
Dundee	200	29.9%
East Lothian	254	28.1%
Glasgow	832	24.3%
Edinburgh	648	23.1%
Scottish Borders	218	22.9%

Education authority	Number of downloads	Proportion of entries
Dumfries and Galloway	258	20.9%
Inverclyde	82	19.3%
Angus	159	19.0%
Moray	143	18.5%
Perth & Kinross	171	17.9%
West Lothian	221	16.5%
Aberdeen	197	15.6%
Highland	312	15.0%
Stirling	130	14.4%
North Ayrshire	146	12.4%
East Renfrewshire	167	11.7%
East Dunbartonshire	125	10.0%
Eilean Siar	19	10.0%
Fife	247	9.7%
Aberdeenshire	177	9.6%
Clackmannanshire	29	9.2%
East Ayrshire	68	7.5%
Renfrewshire	102	6.7%
West Dunbartonshire	40	6.5%
North Lanarkshire	163	5.7%
South Lanarkshire	154	5.4%
Midlothian Council	11	1.9%

Appeal rates

Of the 7,256 marked exam paper downloads, 992 (13.7%) were appealed. This appeal rate was higher than the rate for non-downloaded papers, where 6.9% were appealed.

However, keeping earlier caveats in mind, we cannot know how much of a role, if any, marked exam papers played in decisions to appeal. Moreover, some of the appeal and upgrade numbers for these subjects were very small.

Note that the rates in the table below are based on the total available marked exam papers (table 1) rather than total entries (other tables).

Table 10: Appeal rates of downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers

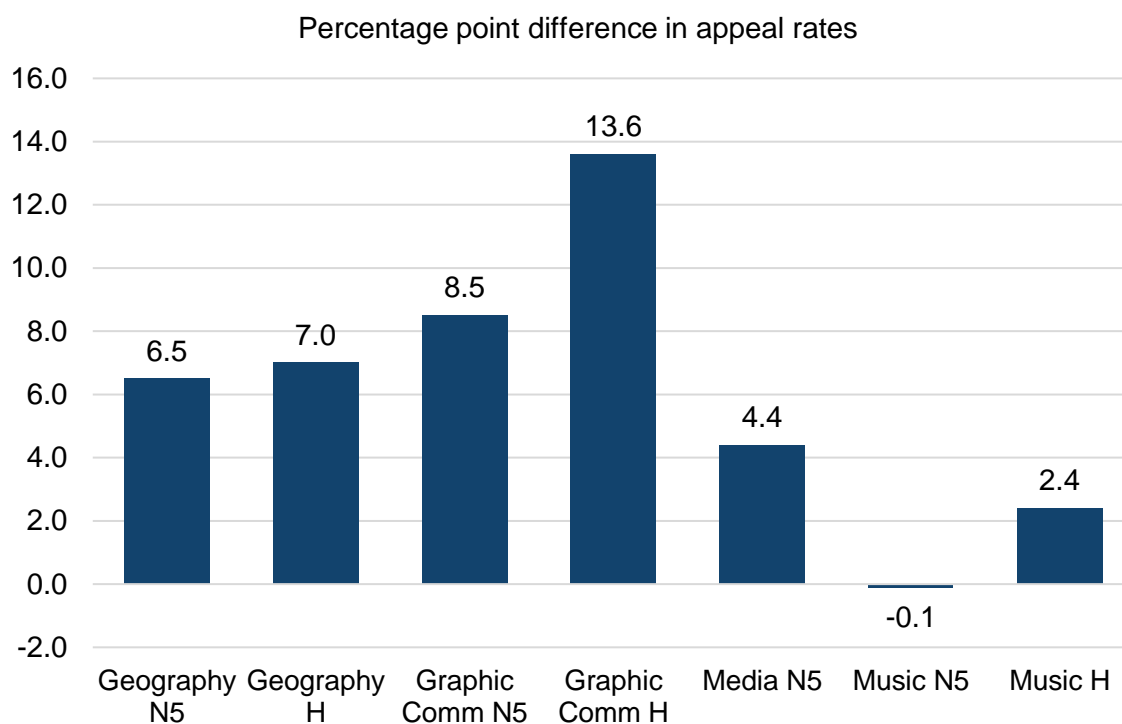
Subject	Level	Number of download appeals	Download appeal rate	Number of non-download appeals	Non-download appeal rate
Geography	National 5	279	14.3%	614	7.8%
Geography	Higher	248	16.1%	547	9.1%
Graphic Comm	National 5	190	17.7%	372	9.2%
Graphic Comm	Higher	155	25.2%	298	11.6%
Graphic Comm	AH	5	12.8%	34	11.8%
Media	National 5	36	9.6%	50	5.2%
Music	National 5	23	2.8%	200	2.9%
Music	Higher	46	7.6%	238	5.2%
Music	AH	7	3.7%	43	2.8%
Statistics	AH	3	4.8%	3	3.5%
Total		992	13.7%	2,399	6.9%

The percentage point (pp) difference in appeal rates between downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers is shown in the chart below. Due to Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, Advanced Higher Music, and Advanced Higher Statistics all having low numbers of appeals (fewer than 10) for downloaded marked exam papers, these subjects have been excluded from the chart.

The chart shows that all AtMEP subjects other than National 5 Music had appeal rates higher for downloaded marked exam papers than non-downloaded papers. The difference was most pronounced for Higher Graphic Communication, where the

downloaded marked exam paper appeal rate was 13.6 pp higher than that for non-downloaded papers.

Figure 62: Percentage point difference in appeal rates of downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers



Appeal success rates

Of the 992 marked exam paper downloads that were also appealed, 104 (10.5%) resulted in an upgrade and 888 (89.5%) resulted in no change. This success rate of 10.5% compares to a success rate of 7.5% for non-downloaded papers.

Table 11: Appeal success rates for downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers

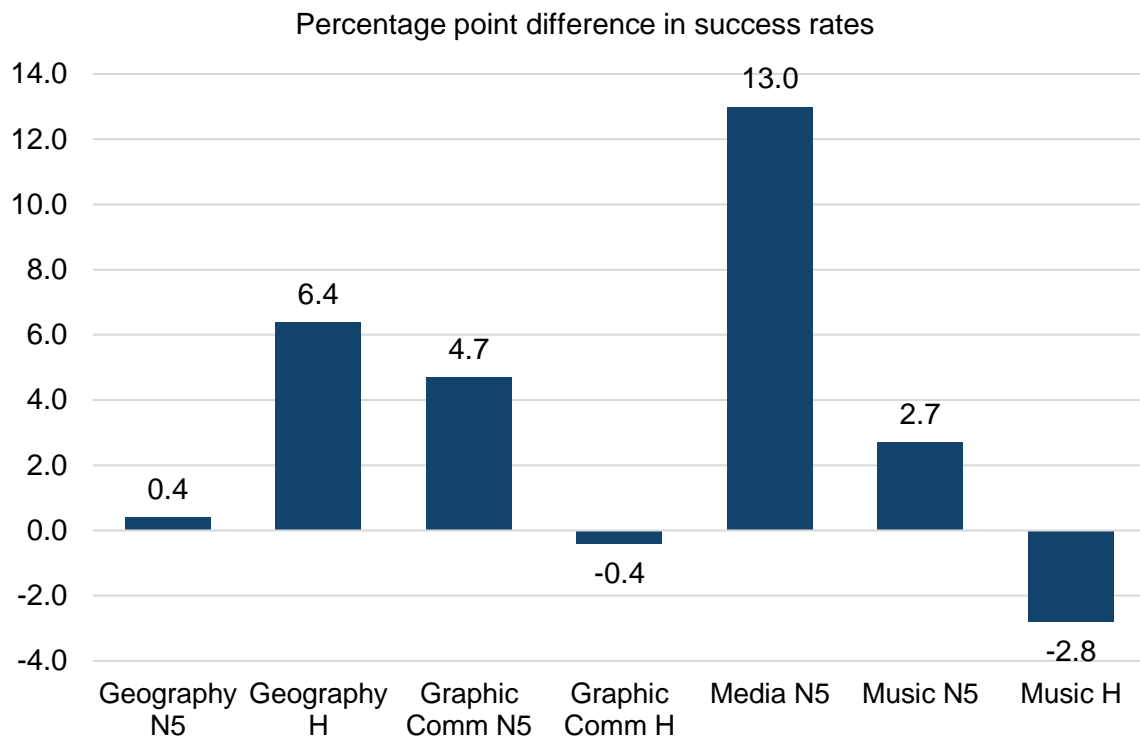
Subject	Level	Number of download upgrades	Download upgrade rate	Number of non-download upgrades	Non-download upgrade rate
Geography	National 5	32	11.5%	68	11.1%
Geography	Higher	43	17.3%	60	10.9%

Subject	Level	Number of download upgrades	Download upgrade rate	Number of non-download upgrades	Non-download upgrade rate
Graphic Comm	National 5	14	7.4%	10	2.7%
Graphic Comm	Higher	1	0.6%	3	1.0%
Graphic Comm	AH	0	0.0%	1	2.9%
Media	National 5	9	25.0%	6	12.0%
Music	National 5	2	8.7%	12	6.0%
Music	Higher	2	4.3%	17	7.1%
Music	AH	0	0.0%	3	7.0%
Statistics	AH	1	33.3%	0	0.0%
Total		104	10.5%	180	7.5%

The percentage point difference in appeal success rates between downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers is shown in the chart below. Due to Advanced Higher Graphic Communication, Advanced Higher Music, and Advanced Higher Statistics all having low numbers of appeals (fewer than 10) for downloaded marked exam papers, these subjects have been excluded from the chart. However, while those subjects with the fewest appeals have been removed, the chart still includes some subjects that had relatively small numbers of successful appeals (see table above).

The appeal success rate for downloaded marked exam papers was lower than that for non-downloaded papers in Higher Graphic Communication and Higher Music (-0.4 pp and -2.8 pp, respectively). However, for other AtMEP subjects the appeal success rate was higher for downloaded marked exam papers than that for non-downloaded papers, ranging from 0.4 pp higher for National 5 Geography to 13.0 pp higher for National 5 Media.

Figure 63: Percentage point difference in appeal success rates for downloaded and non-downloaded marked exam papers



Service enquiries

SQA received a total of 111 enquiries about AtMEP over the eight weeks that the service was open. Of these, 93 were from centres and 18 from learners. The table below details the nature of these enquiries.

Table 12: AtMEP enquiries

Type of enquiry	Subject	Number of enquiries
System	SQA Connect access	34
Candidate	Permission	15
Candidate	Candidate not available	14
System	Guidance	13
System	Location of marking instructions	12
System	Download all button	3
Policy and evaluation	Policy	1
Policy and evaluation	Evaluation	1
Candidate direct	Can I access my marked exam paper?	18

Additionally, six enquiries were received looking for marked exam papers after the service was closed.