

Priority Appeals and Conditional HE Places for Students

Purpose of meeting

To discuss SQA priority appeals timescales (reached in line with UCAS clearing deadlines) and earlier internal deadlines set by some higher education (HE) institutions for finalising conditional offers, and determine what can be done to minimise the impact on learners awaiting appeals outcomes going forward.

Background

As part of SQA's appeals service, a priority appeals process operates for learners requiring the outcome of an appeal for immediate progression to university, college, training or employment.

The timescales for outcomes of these priority appeals to be finalised is arrived at each year in line with the UCAS clearing deadline. In 2022, this was 6 September. This date is determined by UCAS and is the same date for all UK Awarding Bodies.

However, we are aware that some HE institutions set earlier deadlines to meet their internal processes in line with individual term start dates.

This differential in timescales caused concern for learners and their parents who were awaiting appeals that were required for conditional offers. There was an increase in correspondence on this issue this year, with some applicants indicating that they missed out on preferred courses or had to defer their place until next year.

While many institutions aimed to provide flexibility around entry requirements and/or deadlines where priority appeals were being progressed, it is recognised that there were challenges for some universities, particularly for high demand courses including medicine, law and vet.

Particular challenges around appeals in 2022

In recognition of the disruption last year, SQA's appeals approach went further than in recent pre-pandemic years. It built on the approach undertaken historically in Scotland, taking alternative learner evidence into account in the appeals process. This comprehensive appeals process was agreed by stakeholders across the education sector and was put in place to ensure fairness and equity for learners.

SQA is dependent on centres to advise on conditional offers when it comes to priority appeals. It does not have sight of these ahead of the requests which centres have to validate at the same time as they submit their learners' evidence digitally. Due to the number of priority appeals and the resources required to progress these, SQA did not have flexibility to process appeals any earlier.

Along with all other 2022 arrangements, SQA will carry out an evaluation of how the Appeals 2022 service performed. The results of this evaluation will play an important part in informing the decisions around what type of service will be taken forward for 2023, and there is an ongoing discussion with stakeholders through the National Qualifications 23 Group about the approach.