Access to Scripts – Trial Summary and Proposed Recommendations

Executive summary

Following successful completion of the Access to Scripts trial this paper seeks to outline the findings and proposed actions to be considered if a wider service is to be developed in session 23/24. Feedback gathered from those taking part in the trial indicates very strong support for a service that gives Access to Scripts, balanced with some concerns around timing and workload.

Full policy development needs to take place as a priority, after wider consultation with stakeholders. A technical solution that is more closely linked to our eMarking supplier, that allows inclusion of a larger number of subjects following a review of assessment approaches, also needs to be investigated.

Awarding Programme is asked to consider the findings and proposed recommendations outlined below and provide direction on next steps.

Background

Access to scripts for centres and learners is currently not part of the Scottish system. This trial was undertaken with a view to bringing SQA into line with other ROUK awarding bodies enabling centres to access all externally marked materials on behalf of learners. SQA initially reached out to wider education stakeholders to inform them of our suggested approaches. Initial stakeholder feedback was reported as positive and a progressive step for SQA.

Objectives of this trial were to grant transparency of our marking approaches while providing the centre and learner with further information to inform their appeals decisions, and at the same time, provide insight for future learning and teaching.

The outcomes/lessons learned from the trial should inform the development of the policy to underpin the service in 2024 and beyond.

As part of the trial, we examined what several other awarding bodies (ABs) in the Rest of the UK (RoUK) currently do to provide a similar service. The specific deadlines for all ABs may change from year to year. Access to Scripts is granted the day results are issued, priority deadlines vary and depend on request type. All ABs ask for learner consent prior to granting access to scripts. A summary of each ABs processes is noted below.

CCEA (Council for the Curriculum, Examinations, and Assessment):

Learners, typically through their schools, can request access to their marked scripts. The deadline for requesting access to scripts is usually within 20 calendar days of the issue of results. A priority appeals service is offered, where the script can be viewed, with the need for requests to be submitted within 1-2 working days after results are issued, at the cost of £36 per script. Learners can also request marking guidelines, which are typically made available alongside marked scripts. These guidelines help Learners understand the assessment process.

WJEC (Welsh Joint Education Committee):

Learners can request access to their marked scripts through their educational institutions. WJEC generally sets a deadline for requesting access to scripts, which is typically within 20

working days of the release of results. Access to scripts is offered via a web portal and opens on results day. Learners can also request marking guidelines, which are usually provided alongside the marked scripts to aid in understanding the assessment process.

Pearson:

Pearson allows Learners to request access to their marked scripts, and the deadline for this request may vary depending on the qualification and examination. Learners need to check the specific deadline provided by Pearson for their qualification and examination. Learners can request marking guidelines or mark schemes used by examiners to understand the assessment criteria. The availability and timing of these guidelines may vary, so Learners need to check with Pearson or their educational institution.

OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations):

OCR allows Learners to request access to their marked scripts. The specific deadline for requesting access may vary depending on the qualification and examination, but the service opens on results day. A priority service is offered using various methods, an access to scripts request can be made post marking review but is charged at a fee of £14.75.

AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance):

AQA allows Learners to request access to their marked scripts, typically through their educational institutions. The deadline for requesting access may vary depending on the qualification and examination. A priority review of marking service is offered that includes a copy of the marked script as standard, there is a fee of £55.60 per component.

Below is a table showing high level comparison.

Awarding Body	Request Type	Access to Scripts available for Priority	Charge for Access to Script
CCEA	Upon request from centre	Yes (1-2 Working days after Results)	Yes
WJEC	Centre led portal	Yes (portal open on results day)	No
Pearson	Centre led portal	Yes (portal open on results day)	No
OCR	Centre led portal	Yes (portal open on results day)	No
AQA	Upon request from centre	Yes (qualification specific guidelines on priority requests)	No (charge for priority)

SQA Access to Scripts Trial 2023

The trial included nine centres from a wide demographic covering two subject areas, one at National 5 and one at Higher. These subjects provided a range of annotations used in the marking process, with differing degrees of complexity. One school agreed to take part in the trial but did not download any material or participate in any feedback. This centre initially felt they could not dedicate the time to the trial even though the Local Authority expressed a desire that they should take part. The two independent centres taking part have experience of accessing scripts with other Awarding Bodies but on a very small scale.

Once agreement on participating in the trial had been reached, SQA arranged a series of information sessions to explain the concept of the trial including the aims, objectives, and expectations of participants.

- **Support and Communication**: SQA developed and shared guidance on the full process, including system guidance. We also provided guidance and support for conversations with leaners about the trial which included the need to gain permission to access their script.
- **Transparency**: centres were asked to foster transparency in the process, making it clear to learners how they can request access to their scripts, and the timeline for script download. They were advised to make the information readily available and easily accessible.
- **Timely Downloading**: all timelines were explained, and information and guidance on the process to follow was shared with centres to ensure the timely download of scripts for learners who may request access.
- **Secure Storage**: centres were asked to maintain strict confidentiality of personal information throughout the access-to-scripts process. This included protecting candidate information and examination materials from breaches and unauthorised access. Participating centres were also asked to securely store examination scripts to prevent unauthorised access.
- **Promotion of the Trial**: Actively promote the Access to Scripts Trial to learners and stakeholders, highlighting the benefits of the trial.
- **Feedback Mechanism**: Establish a feedback mechanism for learners who access their scripts to share their thoughts and suggestions. We also asked that when the trial concluded to give feedback and to engage in collaborative discussions to help further development of a future service.

- As the trial commenced the Liaison Team worked closely with each centre to support them through the process.

The details of the centres within the trial and the scripts available for each component and subject can be seen below:

Centre Name	N5 Media	H Geo P1	H Geo P2	No of scripts downloaded	Retained scripts
LA Centre 1	17	18	18	53	
Independent Centre A	7	27	27	2	No
Independent Centre B	N/A	50	50	52	Yes
LA Centre 2	27	42	42	9	No
LA Centre 3	22	59	59	140	Yes
LA Centre 4	15	17	17	32	
LA Centre 5	N/A	12	12	0	

LA Centre 6	N/A	47	47	22	Yes
LA Centre 7	N/A	57	57	114	
	61	**329**	**329**		

The trial opened on 8 August 2023 to allow participating centres access to the annotated scripts. This was in line with the 2023 appeals service opening times. Data from Appeals 2023 shows that 16 of the possible 390 learners submitted an appeal after gaining access to their scripts, which is 4.1% of those covered in the trial. The uptake of all centres during the trial was 61% of all available downloads.

Stakeholder Engagement and Feedback.

Following completion of the trial a survey was shared with all nine centres taking part.

Overall, the survey results indicated that the service was easy to use, was able to support appeals decisions where required and was a benefit to learning and teaching. There were some concerns regarding timing of the service and workload when interpreting the marked scripts for learners.

Online Survey

The survey was filled in by 9 respondents, these respondents came from 5 of the participating centres. It was completed by a mix of Depute Headteachers (SQA Coordinators), Principal Teacher of curriculum and subject teachers. All respondents told other teachers in the centre about the trial. One centre went as far as to ask for thoughts from two Principal Teachers of curriculum from other subject areas that were not covered by the trail. Both considered the trial to be a positive step forward for SQA.

All centres that responded informed learners of the trial, but not all informed parents.

Further statistics on the responses can be seen in the tables below:

Trail Use		
How easy was the service to use?	88%	Very Easy – Easy
How clear did you find the communication and guidance about the service?	66%	Extremely Clear – Very Clear
How valuable did you find the service?	66%	Extremely Valuable – Very Valuable
Overall, how satisfied were you with the service?	88%	Extremely Satisfied – Satisfied

Centre Learner Engagement		
Did you share scripts with learners?	22%	
After you had shared their script with them, did you have a conversation with the learner about it?	50%*	*This is half of respondents to previous question.
Did you download a script following a specific request from a learner or parent or carer?	55%	All responses were after Learner requests. No parent requests featured.

To what extent did the service inform learners' decision to appeal?	44%	To a great extent – Some extent

Future Use of the Service	
To inform learners' decision to appeal	44%
To support learning and teaching	88%
To contribute to understanding standards	77%
For continuous professional development	55%

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Face to Face Engagement Sessions

All centres taking part in the trial were offered a face-to-face feedback session. Six centres agreed with four involving the subject teachers in those discussions. No centres facilitated meetings with learners or parents, as they felt their discussion incorporated feedback from these stakeholder groups.

Those that did not arrange a face-to-face meeting felt that they had already given adequate feedback during the online survey or failed to respond to our request for a face-to-face meeting entirely.

Centres that did engage in face-to-face are listed below:

- LA Centre 2,
- Independent Centre B,
- LA Centre 6 (remote delivery),
- LA Centre 3,
- LA Centre 1,
- Independent Centre A.

NB – Notes from each of the F2F sessions can be found below in Appendix 1.

These sessions provided a better understanding of approaches taken and assisted in identifying issues.

A summary of feedback can be seen below:

- Gaining permission from learners was raised as a concern with centres highlighting that further guidance on this should be considered in how to have conversations with learners and be equipped to deal with questions around teaching approaches and marking standards.
- Most all centres had concerns about workload and the time it would take to review scripts to help inform appeals decisions. It was suggested that the problem was in SQA's approach to allowing full cohort download, and perhaps a 'by request' service may reduce this issue. Centres were concerned that workload issues would increase if the service was to be scaled up to include all subjects/levels. These concerns were more prevalent in some centres than others. One centre noted that with 250 appeals submitted this session, tight turnaround deadlines for appeals makes time for download and review all of the scripts difficult. Conversely, one Local Authority centre noted, that the workload concerns were "for us to manage, we wouldn't want workload concerns to impact the availability of this service".
- Scripts were used by some to support the Appeals Service but there was a greater recognition that material would be valuable for Continued Professional Development purposes. However, one independent school said that they were slightly concerned about using this material on an individual centre basis because SQA Understanding Standards resources are standardised and come with a stamp of authority. Most other centres saw that the opportunity to access their own scripts was beneficial, offering a deeper understanding of their own learners' performance.
- There was a lack of understanding amongst some centres about the retention of scripts for future use. Some destroyed scripts they would have retained had they understood this was possible. Others would have downloaded and kept more scripts had the service been open longer as other ABs keep the service running for a longer period.

- The two independent centres that provided feedback were in support of the service, but they had very specific concerns about parental and learner expectations. One centre felt this could lead to very difficult situations as the level of parental involvement at their centre is already high. They also raised concerns that learners may not wish for their parents to view their script, which could introduce GDPR issues for the centre. Local Authority schools mentioned the parental concerns, but it did not come through as strongly during discussions.
- Users noted the system was easy to use, however the ability to combine components within one download would have been more time efficient. The assessment delivery model and marking process of components does not allow components to be combined. However, including learner details within the naming convention of the downloaded file could be noted as a future development.
- All centres advised that this was a welcome learning opportunity and if they were to go through this process again, they would do things slightly differently within the centre. Centres mentioned suggestions such as, gaining permission from learners ahead of deadlines, informing teaching and learning rather than just appeals if they had more time, and using material as examples of good practice for teaching and CPD. They also discussed the need for internal plans for handling the demand if all subjects were included in a future service.

Considerations

The trial provided a better understanding of the risks and opportunities if SQA were to offer a wider service in the future. The following have been identified as areas where consideration needs to be given:

Policy

It was agreed with the Awarding Programme that the trial would help to shape policy and the nature of the service. If the trial is to be progressed to a wider service, there is a need for some policy development, and the assumption would be that ownership should be within the PAS directorate with a clear understanding of who should create policy and undertake impact assessments for EQIA and CRWIA.

Technology

Development of a service was undertaken at pace. It was also agreed that manual intervention should be avoided as part of this process. However, the solution that was delivered involved several manual workarounds. This included removal of any scripts deemed to be sensitive (such as those under investigation for malpractice), internal download of all required scripts from the RM system due to lack of system integration, several interventions to remove superfluous information from front pages, and manual upload of all scripts into the system.

Scripts such as those covered by, malpractice concerns, exceptional circumstances, offensive content, undecipherable scripts, PA referral, AA referral, and those identified as having candidate welfare concerns, all needed to be removed from the process manually until investigations were concluded. A process for identifying and removing these more readily needs to be examined.

Business systems colleagues have noted that the current system would require further development to ensure scalability. During the trial SQA staff downloaded full cohorts within

the Admin Interface of our eMarking supplier and carried out manual processes to remove front covers and upload all material to the centre facing portal.

Therefore, it is recommended that there is a full review of the system delivered within the trial and, technical solutions need to be planned and delivered removing any manual intervention. Any future service should also ensure that eMarked materials are available at the time and to the capacity needed for an access to scripts service.

Delivery of the Service

Feedback shows that centres would benefit from extended opening periods of the service. Other ABs offer this service for a much longer period than we did during our trial. This would assist with the spread of centre workload and give extended access to materials helping inform learning and teaching.

Marking Types

Currently 361 components are assessed within NQ qualifications across all levels, of these 209 are marked from image and 152 are marked using other methods (i.e., marking from paper, traditional marking). An annual review of marking methods is underway. Further work has been undertaken within Qualifications and Operations Directorates to identify components that could move to be marked from image. This work is ongoing and is not included within the scope of the trial.

We are looking at ways to continue to move as many subjects as possible (that can be scanned) over to e-marking through working with our eMarking supplier. There may also be opportunities to move more components to e-marking through developments resulting from Education Reform.

The functionality of the current system has been enhanced over time – so things that couldn't have been done previously within the e-marking system are now potentially possible. For example, there are challenges in the social subjects area around marking of learner's exam scripts as they were long essay type responses that were difficult for markers to navigate around and assign marks. Our eMarking supplier has new functionality that will help markers with this.

Before moving away from previous approaches we need to ensure that the examining team and markers are prepared and ready for that change to protect the quality of marking – so there are process and training aspects to ensuring a smooth transition from our current approach (custom and practice) to a new approach – understanding the nature of the change and the impact upon people and how best to manage that change whilst maintaining quality.

To ensure inclusion of as many subjects as possible in a future service there also needs to be some assessment redesign, that incorporates a consideration of marking methods, that prevent any manual intervention when giving access to scripts. Consideration would also need to be given to the inclusion of objective tests in a future service.

Learner Engagement

Legal advice sought during the planning of the trial noted that wider engagement with the education system should be considered for any future service; this should include learners. A full consultation on our approach to giving access to scripts should be considered.

Recommendations

Awarding Programme Board is asked to consider the recommendations and agree next steps.

In response to the outcome of the trial and feedback SQA should engage more widely with all stakeholders on a future service. After engaging in a full consultation process, a larger pilot should be planned and developed with an increased number of centres and wider spread of subjects.

There is a need for development of a full policy. Assumption would be that ownership of any policy would sit within the PAS directorate. There is a need for clear roles and responsibilities around the creation of any policy and impact assessments. Any policy development should feed into the development of a full EQIA and CRWIA.

A more streamlined, scalable, technical solution should be investigated and developed ensuring no manual intervention. Any technical solution should consider options of a 'by request' service *or* access by centre to full cohorts, these are both options offered by other RoUK awarding bodies.

There would need to be some assessment redesign, that incorporates a consideration of marking methods, that prevents any manual intervention when giving access to scripts. Consideration would also need to be given to the inclusion of objective tests in a future service.

Governance and project structure should be initiated to allow investigatory work to commence as soon as possible. This should be managed within the Awarding Programme.