

## SATH Committee Evidence – Follow Up – February 2025

What follows is a snapshot of some of the most serious concerns that have emerged from our asking the profession to share experiences of working with the SQA.

One of the most serious experiences we encountered relates to the treatment of a teacher who was [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] raised concerns and whilst [REDACTED] concerns were ignored, [REDACTED] 'behaviour' was not. Not only was [REDACTED] contract terminated, but [REDACTED] experience had serious implications for the team [REDACTED] worked on, and, by extension, the pupils sitting National 5 History [REDACTED]. More of this episode was shared by one of [REDACTED] colleagues [REDACTED] who establishes clearly a pattern of bullying behaviour, a toxic culture, and SQA bosses, time and time again, covering things up [REDACTED].

We were previously aware of situations where History teachers who marked for the SQA were removed as markers for voicing concerns; it seems that most History teachers know someone, or know of someone, in this position. More worrying is a handful of cases where someone working at the SQA has contacted headteachers, asking those who are critical of the SQA be disciplined. Appendix 3 details one such experience where the teacher involved was not even an SQA appointee. The behaviour demonstrated by the SQA in terms of tracking this individual, as well as attempting to apply a sanction, raise a lot of questions.

Mentioned at the Committee hearing, unexpectedly, was the 2020 SATH survey that was shelved. This was after two interactions with SQA employees; a phone call from [REDACTED] to myself when I was President in October 2020, and an email exchange from [REDACTED] to then Vice President. [REDACTED] relates to this exchange, and makes clear that the SQA were displeased with the survey and it could potentially lead to the SQA failing to support SATH in the future, which very much echoed the message in the phonecall to myself. SATH is an independent organisation and should not be answerable to the SQA, and yet our teachers rely on SQA sharing information and supporting us. This was an impossible position for SATH to have been put in, and one that highlights again how difficult the organisation is to work with.

Although the longstanding problem of the culture at the SQA is a significant problem, we don't want to lose sight of what has brought this to a head: in the 2024 exam, significant

numbers of our pupils got poorer grades than the profession feels they deserve, and teachers have lost confidence both in the SQA marking team and in their own abilities. Appendices 5, 5b and 6 speak to the scale of the problem, and offer a helpful reminder of the very serious questions with regards to marking procedures, and the grades pupils received in 2024, that have simply not been addressed yet.

Finally, it is important to raise how our own concerns have been dealt with. SATH was asked, by the Scottish Government, how Scottish history teachers responded to the August 2024 results, which led to a survey. This was published, but immediately withdrawn after attention was drawn to names which had not been redacted. The SQA made a number of requests in the wake of this, including the rewording of an apology (numerous times), and that certain comments which were critical of the SQA were removed. This behaviour is troubling, and made worse by the SQA's denial that they requested an apology or comments be removed. As is clear from Appendix 7, this is not the case.

## Appendix 1

Good evening,

...

My name is [name redacted] and I am emailing to share my experience working with SQA.

[redacted]  
[redacted]

In Dec 2018 I had a disagreement with [redacted] regarding content producer, the portal used to securely store items written for the exam. This led to my dismissal and the resignation of several members of the [redacted] team including [redacted] [name redacted] -who supported my complaint.

**Background**-I had complained about content producer on a number of occasions both verbally and via email over a period of many years. I believed content producer was not secure because the system kept losing my work. This resulted in having to re-type the items I had written on at least two occasions and I felt overall quality assurance of the process was compromised because of this flaw in the system.

In Dec 2018, a couple of days before the Christmas holidays [redacted] [redacted] emailed me to tell me one of the exams I had written for the 2020 exam diet was not saved on content producer.

The deadline had been Nov 19<sup>th</sup> [redacted] so I knew for an absolute fact that what I had written had been saved correctly the day before the deadline. (I had checked this-twice) I was informed by [redacted] I would have to re-type the exam again. Immediately. (For context this could take anything from 45 mins to 1 hour 30 mins)

I felt this was unreasonable for many reasons-I was a Pt at the time and was in the middle of prelim marking, I had not been informed the work had been missing for a month after the deadline. I had complained before about my work being lost and felt I had been gas lighted. It was the week before Christmas and [REDACTED] I was irritated by the command to re-type without any conversation about how the work was lost. I informed [REDACTED] I would re-type the exam if SQA paid me for my time. I felt I needed to take a stand.

This did not go down well, despite the fact that in [REDACTED] [REDACTED] I had never once missed a deadline, or made a mistake in my work or received any negative feedback for the exams I had written. I felt I was regarded very quickly as a problem.

I spoke to [REDACTED] about the issue and [REDACTED] supported me completely. I believe [REDACTED] support of me led to [REDACTED]. I was invited to a meeting which included no representation for me and three members of the SQA hierarchy. There was no acknowledgement Content Producer had been a problem. The discussion was about my behaviour.

Despite my colleagues confirming there were issues with content producer and speaking of my good character, I was informed shortly afterwards that my services would no longer be required.

I whole heartedly agree that it is almost impossible to engage in professional dialogue with SQA because their automatic response is attack. There is no reflection of their actions and a blind unwillingness to accept any comment which they deem as criticism. [REDACTED] my opinion embodies this attitude.

The impact on the [REDACTED] exam as a consequence of several key members leaving at the same time that year and since has been significant.

Just this year a question (9 mark) in the [REDACTED] topic appeared which included factors not in the specification. I emailed [REDACTED] to raise a complaint about this. I do not feel I received a satisfactory reply. So the

problems are not just with [REDACTED] they are present at [REDACTED] as well and this is very noticeable if you study one of the less popular topics.

Hope this helps, thank you and good luck!

[Name redacted]

## Appendix 2

Hi Rebecca,

I have worked for the SQA in the following capacity:

[REDACTED]

I have worked with both [name redacted] and [name redacted] as [REDACTED] and had a very positive working relationship with [name redacted] when [REDACTED] for History.

Areas of concern from my own experience:

- I was a member of the [REDACTED] History team when, in February 2019, [REDACTED] was sacked - to the complete shock [REDACTED]. This was done within weeks of procedures for the 2019 diet. [REDACTED] did not once address this issue with the [REDACTED] and instead it was left to [name redacted] [REDACTED] at SQA to come and smooth over the mess.
- I was a member of the [REDACTED] History team when I was present at an item checking meeting that [name redacted] [REDACTED] had to attend in order to apologise for the hurt and anger that had been caused by the sacking of [name redacted] [REDACTED] where [REDACTED] said absolutely nothing regarding the issue.

[REDACTED]

- I was a member of the [REDACTED] History team when, [REDACTED] was sacked [name redacted] as [REDACTED] for flagging up concerns regarding the use of Content Producer. These were significant issues that we all faced [REDACTED] and were being raised by [name redacted] as a way to make the system better.



█ has never returned to work for the SQA and we have lost that wealth of expertise.

- I was a member of █ History team when █ labelled another █ a "control freak" in an item checking meeting. █ was forced into █ in order to make a face-to-face apology, along with [name redacted], █
- I was a member of █ History team in █ when an experienced member of █ team was removed from a marker check procedure for █. █ was taken out and spoken to in an unprofessional manner by █ and █ (completely contrary to SQA grievance procedures).

I was a member of █ History team in █ when █ (and had previously had a positive working relationship with █ resigned during a procedure due to how █ was being managed and communicated with by █

It is very widely known that if you are an SQA appointee for History, and you challenge/criticise/offer a different opinion to that of █ you will not be asked back or invited to be an appointee.

This toxic culture within the SQA History team has been widely known about at the highest level of SQA management, for a number of years █ were both made aware of these concerns in 2019 by a number of appointees, via letter, yet they chose to do nothing about it. Indeed, part of this letter noted "we are concerned that a culture has recently developed within our subject area whereby any legitimate questioning of SQA policy and procedures will result in contracts not being renewed". See letter and response attached.

I am in no doubt that the crisis that is currently facing History qualifications in Scotland is as a direct result of the SQA sanctioning this culture to exist and grow █

**How can we move forward:**

█  
█

- █ [REDACTED]
- SQA must bring History into line with other subjects (like Geography) who receive the marked scripts of their candidates in an electronic format after marking is complete and accreditation has taken place. Had we had that in 2024, it would have gone a long way to stave off the crisis that we are in now. Given that SQA are already moving to online script marking for History, this should be an easy win for them to present as acting in a transparent way (especially given the accurate accusations of marking as being a 'closed shop')
- Scripts that are used for exemplification in marking this year (briefing, practice and qualification scripts) to be made public to all History colleagues in order to further exemplify standards
- For SQA to conduct a review of their appointee procedures to ascertain how [REDACTED] in SQA has the power to hire and fire on an annual basis for people who do not agree with internal decisions

Again, thank you for raising these matters for the profession and for those of us still 'inside' the SQA system who wish to remain for the rebrand!

[name redacted]



### Appendix 3

In [redacted] reacting to the truly astonishing [redacted] I made some remarks on [redacted], which is a closed forum for the discussion of such matters. The comments made were certainly sarcastic, but they were not in any respect defamatory. They were made as personal comments, and in no way represented the position of my employer. The next day, [redacted] [redacted] were sacked [redacted].

A few days after posting, I was called to my Principal's office, where I was presented with screenshots of my comments, which had been emailed to [redacted] by an SQA functionary, with the request that I be disciplined for making them. My Principal rightly judged that the comments I had made in no way defamed either the SQA, or the school in which I work, and having been posted in private, were of no concern [redacted]. The matter was brought to my attention 'for information only'.

I then realised that nowhere [redacted] does it state that I am an employee of [school redacted] and I do not and never have worked for the SQA. As such, someone at the SQA had evidently instructed an employee to 'snoop' [redacted] and otherwise make enquiries as to where I worked. Having done so, they took it upon themselves to screenshot my comments without permission, and email them to my Head, demanding [redacted] action- a clear case of bullying and intimidation.

I obviously complained about this and the SQA subjected themselves to an internal review of practice. They denied that anyone had 'snooped' on me, as, apparently, I am a 'well-known' figure (!) in Scottish History teaching and as such, it naturally follows that everyone knows where I work. One can possibly imagine my position on this derisory conclusion! However, the SQA did admit that they had failed in their safeguarding and in contacting my school they had broken GDPR regulation, for which they did issue, and I accepted, their written apology.

## Appendix 4

Following announcement in late September 2020 about changing arrangements for NQ History, the SATH committee agreed to survey teachers asking what they thought of the proposed changes and what they felt SATH, Education Scotland and the SQA could do to help them meet those arrangements. The survey went live on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2020 was advertised via SATH groups on Facebook and Teams as well as by the SATH mailing list.

Submissions from teachers closed 19<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and there were 188 respondents.

The results were shared with the SATH committee, and [REDACTED] from Education Scotland and [REDACTED] from SQA.

[REDACTED]

The senior SQA appointee responded to the email with a very detailed critique of the survey, suggesting that we had been “politically maladroit” in sending out the survey, and were upset at the wording used throughout. [REDACTED] also advised “that SATH may want make sure that it collaborates effectively with the SQA as it is a mutually beneficial relationship from which SATH gains much in being able to call upon SQA expertise.”

At no point did the senior SQA appointee choose to engage with the secondary part of the survey (which to us was the more useful part) about requests for support but instead chose to be defensive over whether teachers were happy or not. Had they engaged with us on the findings of the survey we would have been happy to consider what information was shared to avoid any upset.

Whilst the SQA did not ask us explicitly not to share the findings of the survey, through these exchanges they made it very clear that they were not going to engage with us on supporting teachers further (if we did). The committee decided not to share the survey findings more widely to avoid exacerbating tensions, and instead looked to create internal programmes to assist teachers.

## Appendix 5

Hi Rebecca,

I am [redacted] at [school redacted] in [location redacted] and have been following the Higher debacle with great interest.

I wondered if this Excel of local authority subject results might be of interest since I saw discussion at the committee on Wednesday of whether results could be compared across subjects and years in an attempt to prove/disprove the 'it was a bad cohort' theory...

In my own local authority, A passes at Higher History dropped from 31.3% in 2023 to 15.3% in 2024, yet in Higher English the change was only 23.3% to 19.2%.

Hope it helps; keep fighting the good fight!

Best wishes,

[name redacted]

## Appendix 6

Hello Rebecca,

Thank you to you and the rest of the SATH team who have represented us so well in raising the issues with Higher history. I have taught over [REDACTED] and share your frustrations. The introduction of both Nationals and New Higher has resulted in a formulaic approach which Teachers have struggled to understand in addition to the various 'hoops' we now train our pupils to jump through.

I am a [REDACTED] so have not published any comments **but I did express my concerns to the SQA privately. I got the same public response as everyone else.**

I found the SQA Investigation disappointing but entirely predictable. I don't believe the Senior Marking Team have recognised the genuine concerns which need to be addressed in order to build confidence in the subject.

Our paper 2 results were hard to explain. **Paper 1 and Assignment marks we had a 100% pass rate, however our paper 2 results pass rate dropped to 27%. I do not understand how the same pupils can do so well in one paper but not the other.** While I did reflect on my own practice I was reassured that our paper 2 pass rate last year was 70% which suggests teaching and resources were fit for purpose.

Some comments in the Report was alarming such as 'some markers' were not clear about standards – how many is some? All markers should be clear!

The Marking Team reviewed a 'small sample' of Explain questions from the M&E paper- the Report suggests that 100 scripts were chosen which equates to less than 1% - this is not robust enough.

Marker Check indicated that only 67% of markers were within the accepted standard but alarmingly 33% were slightly out with. I also note that the level of A grade markers has decreased from 78% to 67% in 2024.

As part of the review there is also mention that 100 scripts which had passed marker check were scrutinised. Again, this is less than 1% of the cohort. This is evidence that Markers were not clear of standards.

Given the level of media and feedback from Teachers I would have expected this Review to investigate at a deeper level and use statistical evidence to investigate if errors could have been made by markers or if certain schools were affected.

I would like to have seen data, marker reviews and assurances that the following was checked

- Schools where pass rate in paper 2 dropped from last year
- Correlation between paper 1/Assignment and paper 2 marks – how many pupils grade dropped as a result of paper 2
- An examination of marker packs to detect harshness or leniency
- The experience of markers who marked paper 2. (I am not blaming markers, it is the clarity of marking standards I question)

In short, it is clear the Senior Marking Team believed they had applied the standards as per previous years. However, they have failed disseminate the standards clearly during markers meetings. While robust discussion perhaps took place in small teams, these have not been feedback to the Senior Team or adjustments made with the end result that Markers through no fault of their own are not 100% clear of the standards to apply and this has led to inconsistent marking.

I hope all goes well tomorrow.

Thanks,

[Name redacted]

PT History [location redacted]

## Appendix 7

### Evidence re Higher History Survey – K. Macdonald, SATH President

- The results of the SATH Higher History Survey were shared on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December following the closing date of the survey, Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December.
- I met with representatives of SQA and the Scottish Government on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December to discuss next steps.
- A number of actions were agreed in terms of providing support to History teachers. The need to improve communication and the breakdown of relationships came through repeatedly in the survey and was shared by me.
- On Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December I received a formal letter from SQA, advising me that a member of the SQA team [redacted] and [redacted] [redacted].
- I was instructed to remove the survey, redact the names, instruct SATH members not to share the original version of the survey and publicly apologise [redacted] [redacted].
- I was asked to confirm that I had done all of these things on the same day.
- I removed the survey and issued both a public apology and a direct apology on that same day.
- On Monday 15<sup>th</sup> December, I was asked for a follow up conversation. In this conversation I was told that [redacted] was very upset, it was the straw that had broken the camel's back for them, [redacted] [redacted], and that [redacted].
- I was told to remove my apology from Facebook – the reason given was that it was not public enough.
- I was also told that my apology had to be sent to SQA first before it was shared publicly, and that the redacted version of the survey was to be sent to SQA first before it was re-released.
- I did not feel that they had the right to ask this of me, but in the interests of maintaining relationships and keeping lines of communication open, I agreed.
- I sent over the apology and the redacted survey on 17<sup>th</sup> December.
- I received the response below:

Hi Kirsty,

I've had feedback on behalf of [redacted] about the apology you sent over this morning. Unfortunately, the feedback is that the apology is insufficient and there is a request for the following:

- Expect SATH to clearly state that it does not stand by these comments and will not tolerate abusive and unprofessional attacks on a member/s of SQA staff. SATH must clearly state that it apologies unreservedly for the distress caused, that it dissociates itself from these comments and that it will take measures to ensure this never happens again.

Kirsty, I'm happy to talk through if that would be helpful.

Thanks,

[redacted]

- On 18<sup>th</sup> December I sent over the redacted survey again, after being informed that the redacted survey still had names in it.
- On 20<sup>th</sup> December I received an e-mail with 13 more comments “for my consideration” as they either identified individuals or “because of their nature in a public forum”.
- I felt increasingly under pressure to remove comments, [redacted] left me uncertain as to whether there could be serious consequences of republishing the survey without removing these comments.
- Every time a request was met another would appear.
- I received three e-mails from SQA on the first week back after the Christmas holiday asking for a discussion regarding the apology and the comments in the survey.
- I was finding it increasingly difficult to find time for additional meetings, and frustrated that this was going around in circles.
- Again I agreed in the interests of maintaining positive lines of communication, but felt that this was becoming unreasonable.

[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted]  
[redacted] I expressed again discomfort at removing comments. I was told it was up to me, however, the e-mails and requests for meetings seemed to contradict this. I felt I needed assurances that there would not be negative consequences for us, and these were not forthcoming. [redacted]

- On 17<sup>th</sup> January I received an e-mail from SQA reprimanding me for failing to provide another version of the apology and the redacted survey for [redacted]



[redacted] to check, as discussed on 14<sup>th</sup> January at the meeting. The e-mail requested that I provide these by the Monday and meet again on the Tuesday. I felt the tone was inappropriate given that I am not an employee of the SQA and not, I feel, obliged to run the wording of the apology by them, or to have their approval before sharing the survey.

- I did, however, again in the interests of a cooperative relationship, agree to meet on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January.
- At this meeting I shared the concern that this was not the first survey that SATH had carried out that had angered the SQA Higher History team. I shared that in 2020 a survey was carried out but never shared following very negative reactions from SQA employees. Concern at this was expressed.
- I had shared prior to the meeting that my original apology stood. I was again told that there were some tweaks being asked for.
- On 21<sup>st</sup> January I was sent the following:

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

[REDACTED]

- It remained unclear to me why certain comments were to be redacted, and what part of these comments specifically I was being asked to redact.
- On 22<sup>nd</sup> January, following our evidence given at the Parliamentary committee, I received an e-mail from my SQA contact asking for a meeting to discuss the 2020 survey, which it was claimed they had no knowledge of. This was sent by the same person who had met with me on Tuesday morning, where I shared the details of this incident.
- I responded to agree to the meeting, and expressed surprise that our conversation had been forgotten. I have received no further communication following this.
- In an article in the Herald on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2025 it is stated that the SQA have responded to questions regarding the apology saying that they have never sought an apology from SATH.