

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201605802, Scottish Qualifications Authority  
**Sector:** Scottish Government and devolved administration  
**Subject:** policy / administration  
**Decision:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Ms C complained about the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)'s marking of a handwritten exam script for her daughter (Miss A). Miss A's script was considered to be illegible when it was initially marked and this resulted in her not receiving the mark she had hoped for in that subject. Miss A had two places at universities that were conditional upon her receiving a higher award than she achieved in that subject. Miss A applied for a place at a university elsewhere and accepted that place the day after receiving her exam results. Miss A's school later submitted a marking review request for her, and she was awarded a higher grade. However, this was too late for her to take up one of the conditional university places she had previously been offered. Ms C complained that pre-certification quality assurance checks had not established an issue with Miss A's script and that the SQA had unreasonably failed to provide information at the time the results were issued to advise that a priority marking review could secure a conditional university place. Ms C was also concerned that the SQA had not handled her complaint reasonably.

After considering the available evidence, we did not uphold Ms C's complaint about quality assurance checking. We found that the initial marker followed the proper process when they considered that the script was illegible and escalated the matter appropriately. The script was then reviewed by a more senior assessor, who agreed that it was illegible. Although a higher award was given following the marking review request, we found that this was as a result of a subject specialist being asked to decipher the handwriting, and so we did not consider that the initial marker and the senior assessor had acted unreasonably.

We also did not uphold Ms C's complaint regarding the information available on priority marking reviews. We found evidence that this information on priority marking reviews was available from a number of different sources and was provided to all candidates ahead of the exam period starting. This included information that this process, rather than a standard marking review request, should be used to ensure deadlines for conditional university places were met.

We upheld Ms C's concerns about how her complaint was handled as we found that the SQA's response did not address all of the key issues raised. The SQA acknowledged this in their response to our enquiries and we made two recommendations in this connection.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms C for failing to address all of her concerns in their response to her complaint. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaint responses should address the issues raised, in line with the complaints handling procedure.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.