

CCEA Equality Screening Exercise

Proposal to Introduce Charges for Examination Appeals

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1 Background and Introduction

In July 2023 CCEA requested that the Department of Education approve the introduction of a fee paid by candidates requesting a preliminary examination appeal or an appeal hearings, in line with arrangements in place for other Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) awarding organisations.

The option of an appeal is open to any candidate who has requested a review of marking (or a centre that has requested a review of moderation) who believes there continues to be an issue with the mark(s) awarded in an assessment.

All panel members received the paper for CCEA's Finance Committee titled: "Increase in Examination Entry Charges and Introduction of Fees for Examination Appeals." Please note, the former was dealt with through a separate screening process.

2 Screening exercise

A screening exercise was carried out with the following included:

- Setting up an equality panel to represent a range of expertise;
- Gathering panel views through an Equality Screening Questionnaire;
- Screening panel meeting to review feedback and agree impacts; and
- Reporting

2.1 Equality panel screening questionnaire

The screening panel was asked to consider and comment on the likely impact, in any way, on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this proposal, including an indication of the level of impact on the group, i.e. minor, major, or none.

Comments were invited for each question for the nine Section 75 categories.

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this temporary process, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?
minor/major/none
2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?
3. To what extent is the temporary process likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?
minor/major/none
4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Additional questions

5. Are there any potential impacts of the process on people with multiple identities?
6. Are there other potential equality impacts relevant to the outcomes outlined that have not been covered?

2.2 Panel questionnaire returns

10 returns were received from panel members. The summary of the findings to each question is set out below.

Question 1 – What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this temporary process, for each of the Section 75 equality categories?

For Religious Belief, Political Opinion, Racial Group, Marital Status, Sexual Orientation, Disability and Dependents, 10 panel members agreed there was no impact and no comments were received.

For Age, 1 minor was recorded.

For Men and Women Generally, 1 minor was recorded.

In both instances the concerns centred on the impact the introduction of a fee for an examination appeal may have on Private Candidates who have entered for CCEA examinations once they have left formal education. It is likely this cost will be borne by them.

After discussion the response to all nine categories under Question 1 the impact was recorded as minor, with assurances to panelists that a communications strategy would be put in place prior to any introduction to ensure centres and candidates are aware of the charges associated with the request.

Question 2 - Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

For Religious Belief, Political Opinion, Marital Status, Sexual Orientation, Disability and Dependents, 10 panel members agreed there was no impact and no comments were received.

For Racial Group, 1 minor was recorded.

For Age, 4 minors were recorded.

For Men and Women Generally, 1 minor was recorded.

In each instance the concerns centred on the impact the introduction of a fee for an examination appeal may have on Private Candidates who have entered for CCEA examinations once they have left formal education, particularly in subjects such as GCSE Mathematics and GCSE English Language. It is likely the cost of an examination appeal will be borne by them, however, as with discussions around Question 1, assurances were given around the communication strategy that would be put in place. Panelists were also assured that particularly in subjects such as GCSE Mathematics the number of appeals in a normal year is extremely low.

Question 3 - To what extent is the temporary process likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

No concerns were formally recorded for Question 3.

Question 4 - Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Although not a protected category under Section 75, there was some concern about the impact the introduction of a fee may have on candidates in particular socio-economic groups and the responsibility CCEA has considering its status as an arm's length body of the Department of Education.

2.3 Screening panel meeting

The panel was invited to attend a MST meeting to allow for discussion on the responses and to decide on the level of impact for each of the section 75 groups.

Where there was deemed to be no impact in an equality category, it was recorded as such and discussion was mainly based around the comments in relation to minor and major impacts. The consultation was in relation to additional bias that may have been introduced as a result of the proposals or bias exacerbated by them.

Discussion at the meeting considered the impacts recorded through the questionnaire and concluded that no major impacts on section 75 groups would result or new bias introduced.

3. Outcomes

Minor impacts were recorded in three areas – Racial Group, Age, and Men and Women Generally.
The introduction of charge for appeals was screened out.

4. Approvals

	Name	Job Title	Date
Screened by	M McAuley	Business Unit Manager Qualifications	3 October 2023
Approved by	K McBride	Head of Resources	3 October 2023

Appendix 1 Minutes of the Screening Panel Meeting

Minutes of the Equality Screening Exercise in Relation to the Introduction of Charge for Appeals

In attendance: Michael McAuley (Chair), Elaine Lennox, John Daly, Pamela Larmour, Deborah Stinson, Roger Trigg, Kelly McBride, Ryan McAuley, Ronan Carberry.
Apologies: Esther Martin, Noeleen McGreer, Andrea Molloy, Liam Dempsey

The Chair opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending the meeting at short notice, and for completing the questionnaire in advance of the meeting. He advised that the proposal was to Introduce a Charge for Appeals.

Discussions had taken place with DE and the Council have been kept abreast of progress. The matter has been discussed at Finance Committee and it was requested that a screening should be conducted before the matter was brought to full Council.

The Chair advised that legal advice had covered two issues, the increase in fees and the proposal to introduce a charge for appeals. Last week the screening had been undertaken in relation to the increase in exam fees and today the screening is in relation to the introduction of a charge for appeals.

The Chair advised that appeals are received each year from centres and candidates against decisions that have been taken in three broad areas: Examination Results, Malpractice Decisions and Decisions made in respect of access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special consideration. Following an examination series, centres and candidates have the opportunity to request a clerical re-check of an examination script, a review of marking of an examination script or a review of moderation, each of these has a cost associated with them. The proposal would be to introduce fees for exam appeals after Summer 2024, dependant on the screening. Unlike the other JCQ Awarding Organisations CCEA is the only body which does not charge for appeals-some are quite high, but the proposal for CCEA is a lot lower.

The Chair then proceeded to go through the findings of the equality screening. He advised that there were 10 questionnaires received.

Section 1

What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this proposal, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none.

The Chair advised that there were 10 questionnaires received and that on section 1 there was no impact for the first three categories Religious Belief, Political Opinion and Racial Group. The first issue raised was in relation to Age, under this category 1 person viewed it as having a minor impact, I responded that it was either major/minor and 8 viewed that there was no impact. The comments received were as follows:

'There may be an impact of some FE and community provision not accounted for in the finance paper.'

People who are 20+ years of age who have returned to education may not be in a position to appeal due to the introduction of charges for appeals. ‘

The Chair advised that all CCEA’s competitors do charge for appeals and as such there is a precedent already set. If a student does request an appeal and the appeal is upheld and results in a grade change they will not be charged.

The respondent who had viewed it as either major/minor, now viewed it as minor. The Chair advised that in relation to appeals, the grammar sector accounted for 91.2% of preliminary appeals in 2019 and 87.3% in 2022, by far the biggest sector represented.

One panel member responded by advising that since there were no appeals for FE and Belfast Met that he would be content to mitigate down to minor.

Recommendation

The Chair recommended that as there were two responses in relation to age that the issues be recorded as minor.

The panel agreed.

The other category with one minor rating was Men & Women Generally, comment as follows:

‘Privately entered candidates will likely be accepting this cost themselves. However, there are a small proportion of privately entered candidates within CCEA’s entry profile.’

The Chair advised that the fee is normally incurred by the appellant but that it is refunded if the appeal is upheld and results in a grade change and the fact it is reimbursed should provide some comfort.

Recommendation

The Chair recommended that as there with only one response in relation that the issue be recorded as minor.

The panel agreed.

Section 2

Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

The Chair advised that there were several comments received under this section in relation to Racial Group, Age and Men and Women generally¹

These are as follows:

Racial Group

‘Ensure that the impact is manageable on FE and community provision using CCEA qualifications.’

Age

'Ensure that the impact is manageable on FE and community provision using CCEA qualifications.

People who are 20+ years of age who have returned to education may not be in a position to appeal due to the introduction of charges for appeals.

Could there be the opportunity to waive fees for examination appeals for older learners?

Could impact on mature students in terms of cost of entry, or those who need to resit passport subjects a number of times.'

Men and women generally²

'Could have an impact on those who need to resit subjects several times. For example, resitting English and or Mathematics at GCSE level to gain a grade necessary to access employment or a course of further study.'

One Panel member noted that the comment under Men and Woman generally was incorrect as the procedure was same for all men and women.

The Chair advised that the consideration would be given to the comments and that in relation to older learners CCEA would provide guidance and support prior to the introduction of the arrangement.

The Chair advised that there were some comments received under sections 4 also under other considerations, but were outside scope of section 75.

The Chair asked the Panel if there was anything anyone wished to raise.

In the absence of no further comments the Chair thanked everyone for their input and advised that the proposal to introduce a charge for appeals had been screened out.

The meeting ended.

² With children and young people: male and female