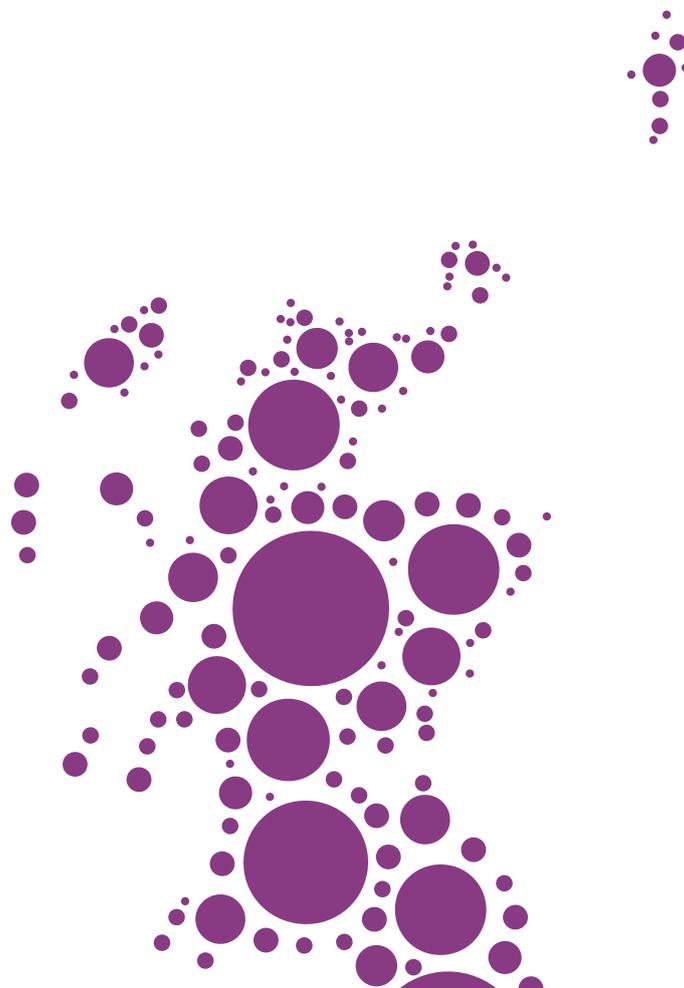


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TeenCovidLife Survey 2 - Schooling Mini Report

Cancelled SQA exams - impact on young people

February 2021



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A note about this report

This is the report on questions related to the **August 2020 Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) results**, from the second TeenCovidLife Survey run by the Generation Scotland team at the University of Edinburgh, in collaboration with the Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network (SHINE) ^[2], at the University of Glasgow.

Generation Scotland developed the survey, collected the survey data, and hosts the data. SHINE advised on the survey content, promoted the study to the SHINE network, and worked with the Generation Scotland team to compile the report for onward sharing.

Acknowledgements

The TeenCovidLife Survey is one of a series of projects run by the Generation Scotland team with support from the Wellcome Trust (reference: 216767/Z/19/Z). The SHINE project is funded by an MRC Mental Health Data Pathfinder award (MC_PC_17217) led by Professor Daniel Smith, University of Glasgow.

Some of the questions in the TeenCovidLife surveys are used with the permission of HBSC Scotland. HBSC Scotland is led by Dr Jo Inchley, University of Glasgow, and funded by NHS Scotland (now Public Health Scotland).



1 Summary

- The SQA-adjusted grades were the most unpopular way to estimate grades. 60% of young people who received SQA grades thought SQA adjusting grades was **not** a fair way to assign grades in 2020.
- The majority of young people thought the replaced grades were fair. 69% thought withdrawing and replacing any adjusted grades with teacher-estimated grades was a **fair way** to assign grades in 2020.
- The majority (86%) of young people were happy with their SQA results. Moreover, almost half (47%) reported the **highest possible happiness** with their final teacher-moderated SQA results.
- Half (50%) of young people who received SQA results in August 2020 thought their final grades would have been **no different** had they sat exams during the summer. Just over a third (35%) thought they would have done **better** if they sat their exams in the summer.
- Almost two-fifths (40 – 42%) of participants had **little to no worries** about the impact of their SQA results on their future education and employment. By comparison, slightly under a fifth (16 – 19%) were **highly worried** about how their SQA results would impact their chances of moving into further education or employment.



2 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of everyone, both young and old. All nonessential travel was stopped, schools and workplaces closed, and for several months we were instructed to stay home as much as possible. One consequence of the pandemic was that in 2020, national school exams in Scotland were cancelled. As a result, many students received final grades for their National 5, Higher, or Advanced Higher qualifications without sitting an exam.

On August 4th 2020, students received grades by post. These were partly based on teacher-estimated grades. The Scottish Qualification Authority (SQA) **adjusted** about one-quarter of grades that had been submitted by teachers. Some students' scores were adjusted to a higher grade, and some were adjusted to a lower grade.

Six days later, on the 11th of August, the Scottish Government announced that all grades that had been **downgraded** would be **withdrawn** and replaced with the teacher-estimated grades.

2.1 TeenCovidLife

Generation Scotland ^[1] (www.generationscotland.org) is a long-running family and population-based study of health determinants. Since 2006, Generation Scotland has learned a lot about how health is affected by where we live, what we do, our habits, and our family histories, and there are important differences between generations. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Generation Scotland has been running online surveys to understand how people are coping and feeling about life in the pandemic and under lockdown. The TeenCovidLife project has been assessing how young people age 12 to 17 in Scotland have been coping with COVID-19 life.

The initial TeenCovidLife survey, conducted from 22nd May to 1st July 2020, was designed to understand how young people living in Scotland aged 12 to 17 are coping during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly after lockdown measures were introduced. [The general report for TeenCovidLife Survey 1 can be found here.](#)^[3]

This report is based on data from the second TeenCovidLife survey, which ran from 18th August 2020 to 10th October 2020, and was designed to assess how young people were coping after the first lockdown measures began to ease. [The general report for TeenCovidLife Survey 2 can be found here.](#)^[4]

2.2 This Report

Of the total 2,232 young people who took part in TeenCovidLife2, 31% (671) reported receiving SQA results in August 2020. To assess how young people felt about these exam grades, we asked several questions about how fair they felt the grading process was, how happy they were with their grades, and if they felt they would have done better had they sat an exam over the spring. This short report summarises the findings from these participants.



3 Subsample Description

This report is based on the **671** participants who received SQA results in August 2020. The sex of these was majority female, with 71% (479) being female, and 28% (186) being male. 1% (6) did not give their assigned sex at birth.

As in TCL2, a small proportion of participants had a gender different from their assigned sex at birth (2%, 15). Examining the gender of all participants, the gender split of the sample was similar to the sex split (Female: 70%, 473; Male: 27%, 184). A small proportion of participants were a gender other than male or female (1%, 7), and 1% (7) provided no answer.

Due to the small number of transgender and non-binary participants, analyses concerning gender in the remainder of this report will only examine findings from participants whose gender matched their sex assigned at birth.

The average age of the sample was 16. As only 5% (33) of participants were in the 12 to 14 age range, no analyses by age group were conducted.

42% (283) reported that their grades were changed after the announcement on 11th August, while 8% (57) were still waiting to hear about the grades at the time of the survey.



4 Fairness of Grade Estimation Methods

4.1 Description

To assess how young people felt about the grades issued in August 2020, we asked several questions about how fair they felt each method of estimation grades was. We asked participants to what extent they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

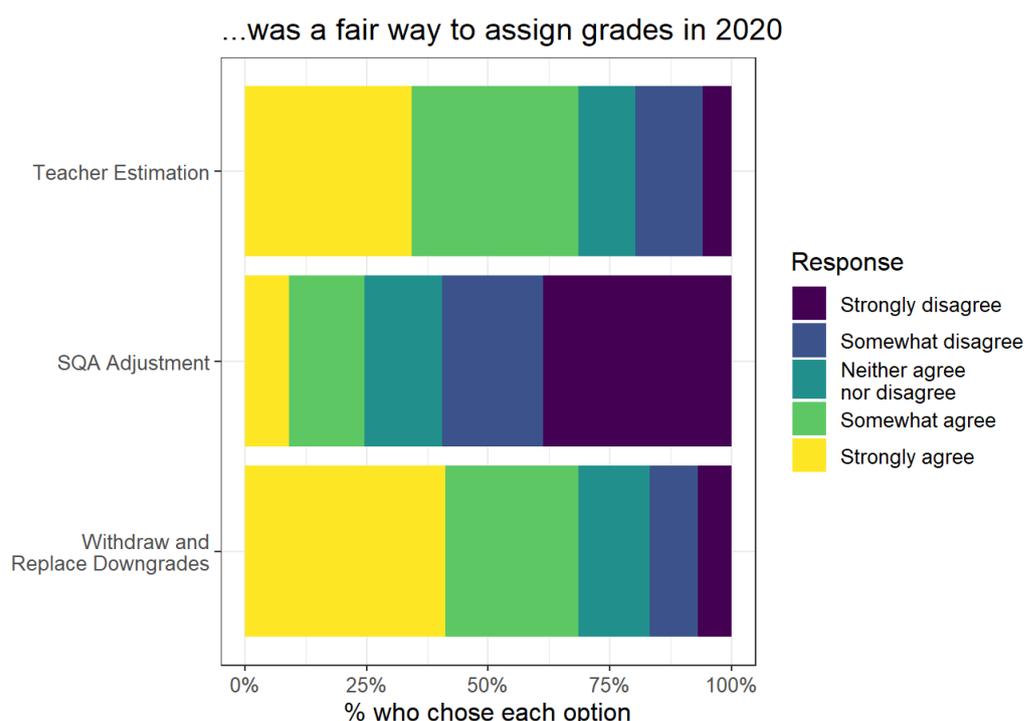
- **Teachers estimating grades** was a **fair** way to assess pupils in 2020.
→ **Total Responses: 667**
- The **SQA adjusting estimated grades** was a **fair** way to assign grades to pupils in 2020.
→ **Total Responses: 665**
- **Withdrawing grades that were downgraded and replacing them with teacher estimated grades** was a **fair** way to assign grades to pupils in 2020.
→ **Total Responses: 664**

Participants could select one option from 'Strongly agree', 'Somewhat agree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Somewhat disagree', and 'Strongly disagree'. Participants could also select 'Don't know'. These latter responses were removed from analyses.

4.2 Findings

Figure 1 shows how fair participants thought each estimation method was.

Figure 1 Percentage of respondents who agreed or disagreed that the *estimation method* was a fair way of assigning student grades in 2020



Based on data from the Generation Scotland TeenCovidLife (TCL) project

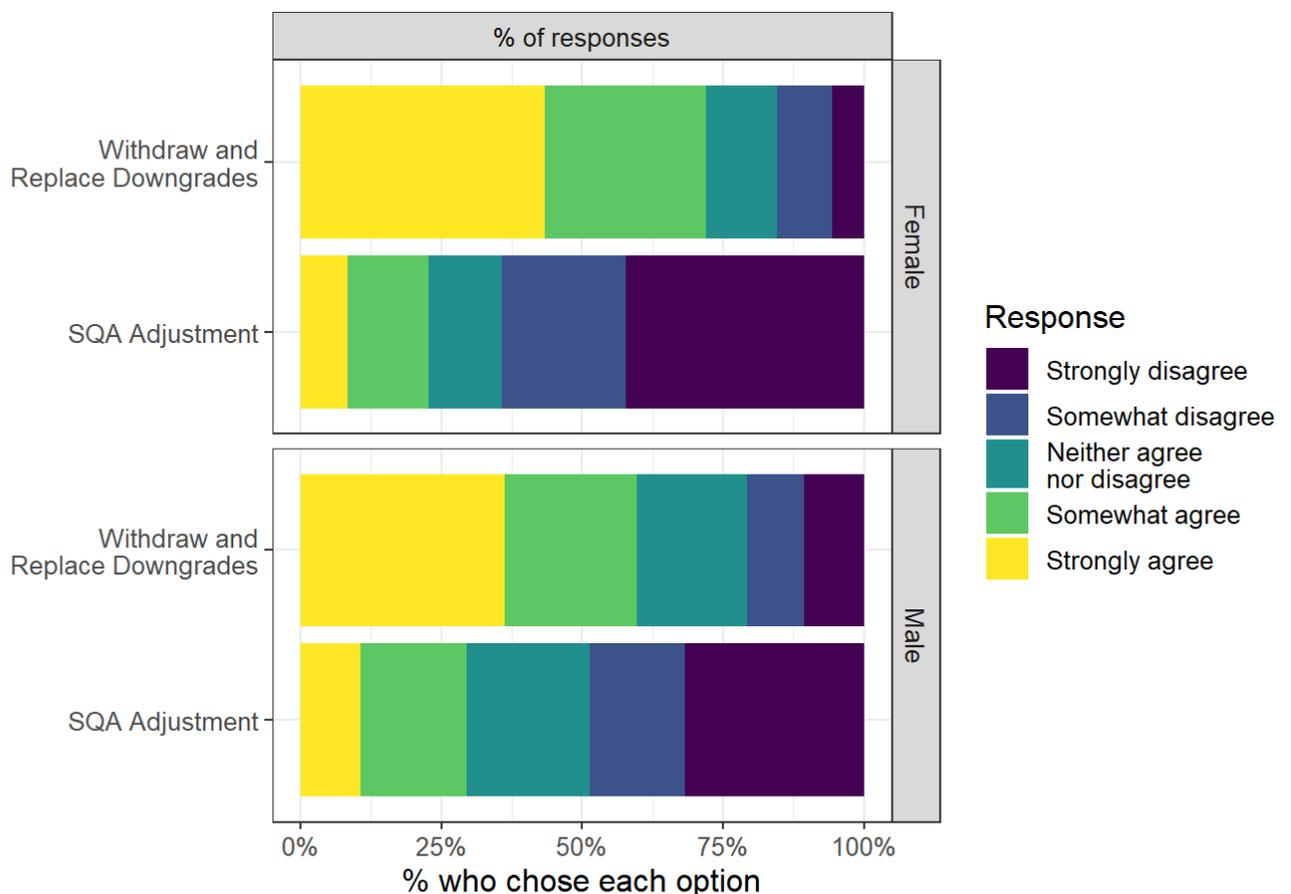


Overwhelmingly, SQA Adjustment was viewed as the least fair way to assign student grades in 2020, with 60% (396) of pupils either strongly or somewhat disagreeing that it was a fair way to assign grades. The majority of pupils viewed withdrawing downgraded scores and replacing them with teacher estimated scores as a fair way to assign grades, with 69% (455) of pupils either strongly or somewhat agreeing it was fair.

Despite this, a minority agreed that SQA Adjusted grades were fair, with 25% (163) of pupils either strongly or somewhat agreeing.

Figure 2 shows percentage of pupils who selected each response for SQA Adjusted and Withdrawn and Replaced grades by sex. There was little difference between male and female participants.

Figure 2 Percentage of participants who agreed or disagreed with fairness of grade estimation method



Based on data from the Generation Scotland TeenCovidLife (TCL) project



5 Happiness about Grades

5.1 Description

To assess how happy participants were with final grades, we asked participants 'On a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'Very unhappy', 5 means 'Not happy or unhappy', and 10 means 'Very happy'...How happy are you with your **final** SQA results?'.

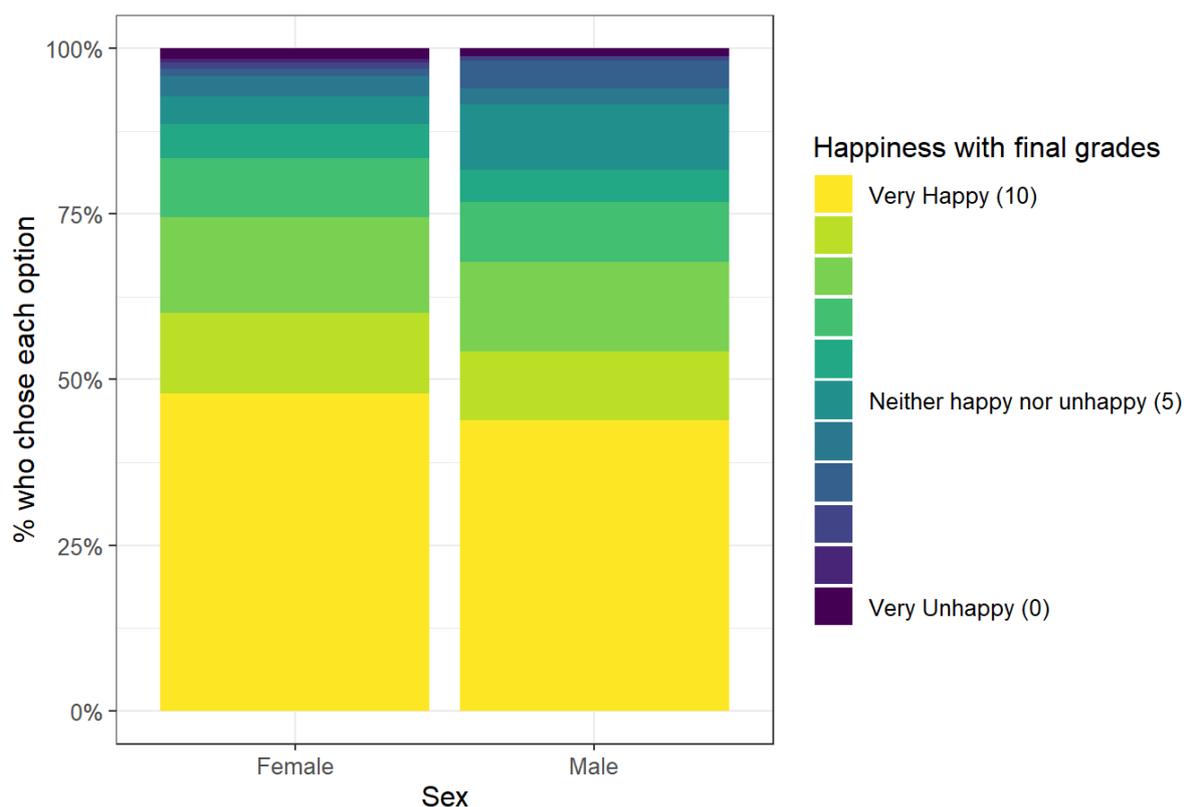
Total Responses: 606

5.2 Findings

86% (523) of participants rated their happiness at least 6 or above, indicating they were at least a little happy with their final grades. Moreover, 47% (282) rated their happiness at a 10, indicating that almost half of the sample were very happy with their final grades.

See Figure 3 for happiness with final grades by sex.

Figure 3 Percentage of participants who selected each happiness rating with grades



Based on data from the Generation Scotland TeenCovidLife (TCL) project



6 Accuracy of Grades

6.1 Description

To assess whether participants thought their grades accurately reflected their ability, we asked participants to estimate if their grades would be higher or lower had they sat exams in Spring, asking 'If I had sat exams in Spring 2020, my grades would...'

Participants could choose one response from 'Definitely be higher than awarded', 'Probably be higher than awarded', 'Be the same as awarded', 'Probably be lower than awarded', and 'Definitely be lower than awarded'.

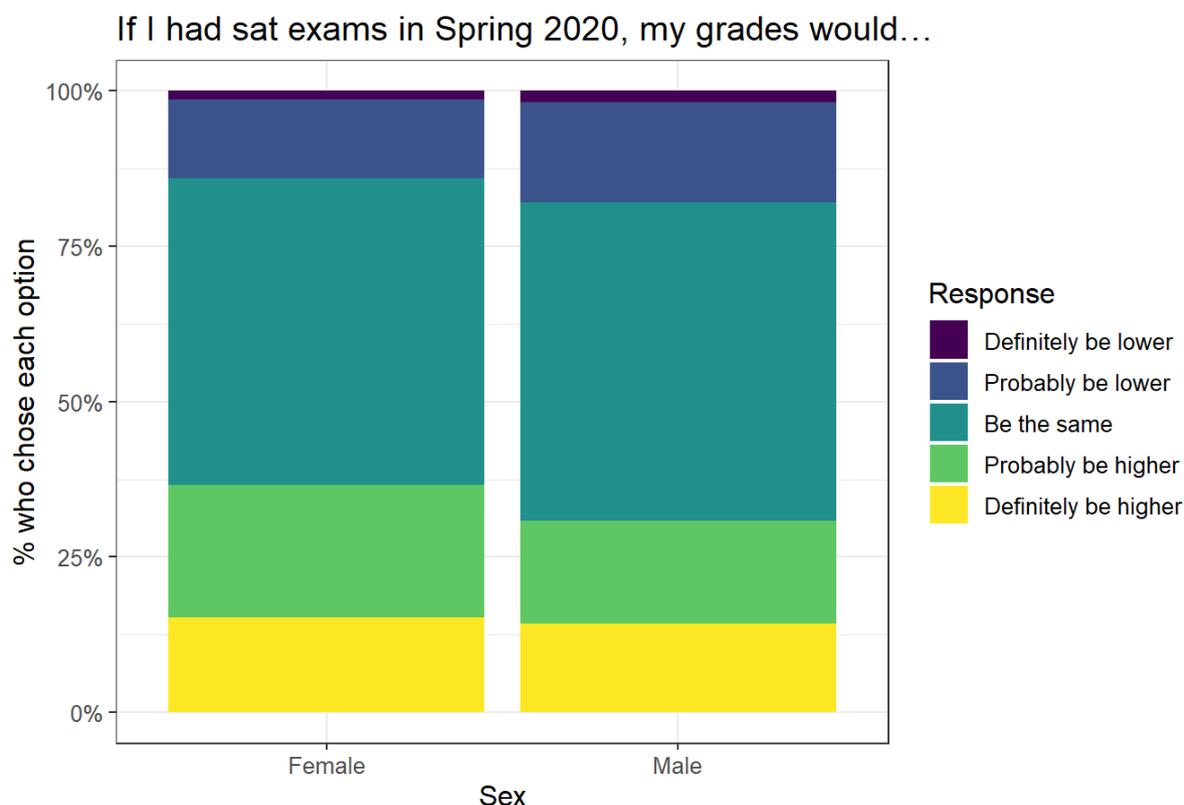
Total Responses: 604

6.2 Findings

Only 15% (91) of participants thought their grades would definitely or probably be **lower** than awarded had they sat exams in spring. 35% (212) believed their grades would have definitely or probably been **higher** than awarded after adjustment. Half of participants (50%, 301) thought their grades were the same as if they had sat exams in the spring.

See Figure 4 for percentage of participants who selected each response by sex.

Figure 4 Comparing received grades to how participants believed they would have done in the exams in spring 2020



7 Impact of Grades on Future

7.1 Description

To assess how worried participants were about the impact of the 2020 SQA results on their future, we asked participants the following questions:

- How worried are you that your SQA results will affect your chances of going on to further or higher education?
→ **Total Responses: 647**
- How worried are you that your SQA results will affect your chances of getting a job in the future?
→ **Total Responses: 645**

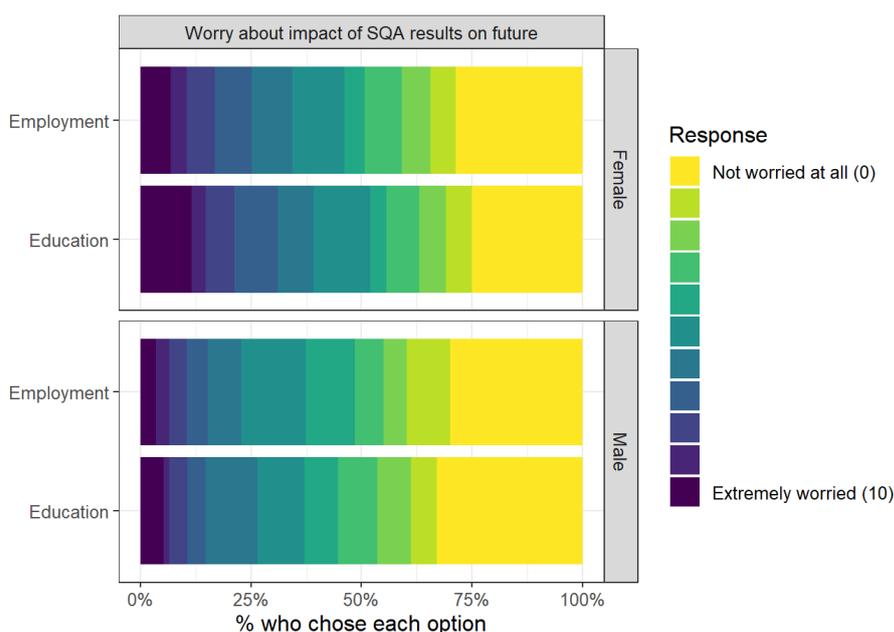
Participants selected one option from a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 meant 'Not worried at all' and 10 meant 'Extremely worried'. Participants could also select 'Doesn't apply to me'. This latter option has been excluded from analyses.

7.2 Findings

On a scale of 0 (Not at all worried) to 10 (Extremely worried), 19% (122) participants rated their worry about how the SQA results would impact their chances of **going on to further or higher education** at **8 or above**, indicating high worry. However, 40% (256) of participants rated their worry at **2 or below**, indicating low worry.

Likewise, 16% (101) rated their worry that their SQA results would impact their chances of **getting a job** at **8 or above**. However, 42% (271) of participants rated their worry at **2 or below**, indicating low worry. See Figure 5 for results by sex.

Figure 5 Percentage of participants endorsing each degree of worry about the impact of SQA results on future employment and education



Based on data from the Generation Scotland TeenCovidLife (TCL) project



8 References

- [1] *Generation Scotland*, at www.generationscotland.org
- [2] *SHINE: Schools Health and Wellbeing Improvement Research Network*, at www.gla.ac.uk/shine
- [3] *TeenCovidLife Survey 1: General Report*, at https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2020-08-07_teencovidlife_survey_1_general_report_v2.pdf
- [4] *TeenCovidLife Survey 2: General Report*, at https://www.ed.ac.uk/files/atoms/files/2021-02-01_TeenCovidLife2_General_Report_v1.pdf

