

# Equality Scheme Progress Report 2007



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## Foreword



SQA is committed to promoting diversity and practising equality of opportunity. We are trying to build an organisation that is truly inclusive, that understands, appreciates and values the diversity of each individual and that incorporates measures to make people feel valued and able to participate and achieve their full potential.

As a service provider, SQA aims to promote equality of access to SQA qualifications. We will seek to ensure that our qualifications are free from real or perceived barriers to learning and that they offer candidates an equal opportunity to achieve *their* full potential.

**Dr Janet Brown**  
**Chief Executive**

## About this report

This report provides a summary of the equality and diversity achievements for 2007. Its purpose is twofold. First, there is a statutory requirement to report annually on issues within the Equality Schemes. Second, it will tell you how the Schemes and the application of the specific duties are having a tangible effect on SQA.

This report combines our Race, Disability and Gender Equality Schemes, and aims to give you an overview of the work we have done to develop our compliance with the equality duties, our approach to training, and the tools we use to assess the impact of equalities legislation on our work.

Whilst you can read this report on its own, you will gain a deeper understanding of its contents by reading the equality action plans — these are available on our website.

Appendices A, B and C describe, respectively, our

- ◆ Equality Framework
- ◆ Communication Plan
- ◆ Functions that are relevant to equality

## The legislative context

In recent years there have been many changes to equalities legislation, reflecting a fundamental change in the way we pursue a society free from unfair discrimination, and in which everyone can reach their full potential. We are moving to a proactive approach to the promotion and protection of equality.

The legislation imposes duties on us. Our specific public sector duties are the road map that we use to meet our general equality duties. These are laid out here:

<b>GENERAL DUTIES</b>	
Race	<p>SQA, in carrying out its functions, must have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ eliminate unlawful racial discrimination</li><li>◆ eliminate unlawful racial harassment</li><li>◆ promote equality of opportunity</li><li>◆ promote good relations between people of different racial groups</li></ul>
Disability	<p>SQA must, in carrying out its functions, have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ eliminate unlawful disability discrimination</li><li>◆ eliminate disability related harassment</li><li>◆ promote equality of opportunity between disabled people and non-disabled persons</li><li>◆ take steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled people more favourably than non-disabled people</li><li>◆ promote positive attitudes towards disabled people</li><li>◆ encourage participation by disabled people in public life</li></ul>
Gender	<p>SQA, in carrying out its functions, must have due regard to the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◆ eliminate unlawful sexual discrimination</li><li>◆ eliminate unlawful sexual harassment</li><li>◆ promote equality of opportunity between men and women</li></ul>

## **Strategic implementation and governance**

SQA is a non-departmental public body established by the Scotland Education Act (1996). It is accountable to the Scottish Government.

SQA's Board of Management is fully committed to its duty to ensure compliance with the terms of this legislation and to take a governance role in the implementation of the Race, Disability, Gender Equality Schemes, and their related action plans.

SQA's Chief Executive is accountable for the fulfilment of our equality duties, and has delegated responsibility for the implementation of these schemes. The Chief Executive informed staff at an all staff briefing on 4 December 2006 of the Disability Equality Duty and our responsibilities under the DDA 2005.

Responsibility in driving forward equality has been clearly agreed and designated, with the appointment of an Equalities Officer in April 2007.

Our commitment to delivering on our equality action plans is reflected in our corporate objectives. Our commitment is clearly stated in our Corporate Plan for 2007–10 (paragraph 4.1.2), which deals specifically with 'people policies' (although our commitment is much wider). This ensures that we have the high-level buy-in necessary to realise our goals.

## Awareness-raising and training

An equality training needs-analysis was undertaken in June 2007. Training is crucial to meeting our equality duties. Although it is not an end in itself, meaningful training can help to sensitise staff to the issues, to their rights and their responsibilities under the legislation.

Awareness of equalities issues has been raised through the following methods:

- ✓ We embarked on an ambitious training programme in the middle of 2007 to ensure that every member of staff received training on equality and diversity issues and legislation. The training was mandatory for all staff, and delegates were invited to challenge their views and behaviours in relation to equality issues and to explore scenarios which were directly applicable to their roles at SQA. Equalities awareness training has now been delivered to all staff, and we have integrated equalities awareness training modules as a compulsory element on the organisation's rolling training program.
- ✓ We are explaining our equalities policies and processes to new staff as part of the staff induction programme, and at business networking lunches. Together these events, which take place during a formative part of a staff member's career at SQA, help to lay the foundation for the awareness training staff receive once in post.
- ✓ Board members have received equalities training.
- ✓ The Equalities Officer attends business area team meetings.
- ✓ Staff have attended a wide variety of training events, including BSL awareness training, breakfast seminars on age legislation, and management development training for women.
- ✓ We have established a working group to develop an online training course for delivery to our appointees. This group has been tasked with the development of a practical scenario-based equalities training module, to provide an opportunity for our appointees to explore issues such as direct and indirect discrimination, stereotyping, and how the Disability Discrimination Act applies to their appointment.
- ✓ All Directors and Business Managers attended a one day workshop to make them aware of our legal requirements with regard to equalities legislation and to assist in their understanding of the process for impact assessment.

***'I learned to question why we have always done things that way!'***

***'I learned to widen my perspective from just disability issues and will consider other strands from now on.'*<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup> Comments from SQA staff feedback on equalities training

## Commitment

- ✓ We have developed an equalities mainstreaming policy that describes our corporate approach to equality. The policy lends weight and authority to our wider equalities work and provides the framework through which all of our equality objectives and duties can be met. It:
  - ◆ defines our legal responsibilities
  - ◆ explains how impact assessment will be incorporated into our decision-making
  - ◆ describes the various processes that ensure the effective mainstreaming of equalities at SQA
  - ◆ sets out the requirements for costing the proposed improvements and actions
  - ◆ details the necessary approval processes
  
- ✓ The policy is communicated to all new staff during their induction and is considered across the business during team meetings and training sessions. As well as raising awareness, it ensures that people incorporate equality in their own areas of work.
  
- ✓ Establishment of an Equality and Diversity Steering Group. Made up of senior staff members from across SQA, this group meets every four months. The Group's purpose is to consider strategic issues and advise the Audit and Performance Committee and Board on the development and implementation of policy for equality and diversity. It also monitors and advises on the implementation of the schemes.

## Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- ✓ Our approach to impact assessment was initially developed in consultation with an external training provider who brought with them a wealth and depth of experience in the delivery of equalities objectives in the public sector. An initial screening tool was developed to decide which policies and procedures are of high priority and high impact. During this process we have and will continue to:
  - map all SQA's policies, procedures and practices
  - agree to undertake the screening process with respect to all equality issues
  - screen all the organisation's policies, procedures and practices, working with someone from the relevant business area
- ✓ The business has been supported in the delivery of impact assessments with the launch of our *Guidance on Carrying out EQIAs*. This sets out the procedures for initial screening, full impact assessment, and the need for consultation and how to do it. It operates in respect of the race, disability, gender and age aspects of equality and diversity.
- ✓ All our current policies and practices have now been assessed for relevance. From this, we identified 18 functions that need to be assessed for equality impact. (Appendix C lists the functions that relate to each business area.) An ambitious program of impact assessments will see all 18 functions subjected to EQIAs over the three-year period that began in September 2007.
- ✓ When deciding how to prioritise these functions (in full consultation with Business Managers from the relevant areas), we considered:
  - relevance to equality and those groups that were affected, and the associated risk
  - the examination Diet — it is vital that impact assessments cause no disruption
  - enabling impact assessment teams access to the Equalities Officer to ensure specialist equalities support and guidance
- ✓ Two processes were established — one for current policies and one for new or revised policies.
  - Until September 2008, all new or revised policies and practices are being reviewed by the Equalities Officer, who will identify actions that are needed to comply with equality legislation and our internal procedures.
  - From September 2008 (to allow time for staff to gain experience in the process) all new or revised policies and practices will be subject to formal EQIA, and all policy-bearing papers that require decisions will

include an initial equality and diversity impact assessment. Where relevant, a full impact assessment will be built into the approval cycle.

- Decisions on action to be taken as result of impact assessment will be included in future annual reports on our schemes.
  
- ✓ During the year, good progress was made in training staff on how to conduct equality impact assessments, ensuring that the business was equipped to carry out the assessments effectively. Half-day refresher workshops are also run in advance of impact assessments for all staff involved.

## Action plans

- ✓ The impact assessments inform the development of our equality action plans in each business area. These are available to all staff, on our intranet. Our action plans will evolve over time, as we undertake further consultation activities.
- ✓ Integrating the action plans into our operational plans has allowed us to work towards meeting the commitments laid out in the Disability, Race and Gender Equality Schemes, and has also ensured that the objectives have been effectively brought into the mainstream of SQA's activities.
- ✓ Responsibility for actions lies with the Business Manager for each area. This ensures that equality becomes organisation-wide practice and goes toward embedding the principles in our core work.
- ✓ All staff have been actively involved in the development of these actions plans. Our achievements to date are shown in Appendix D.

## Monitoring

- ✓ The action plans are tracked, reported on and reviewed monthly by our management team to ensure that our plans are on target.
- ✓ The implementation of the action plans is monitored through the Equality and Diversity Steering Group.
- ✓ Formal update reports will be given to the Audit and Performance Committee every six months.
- ✓ The monitoring contributes to the on-going process of identifying improved outcomes and addressing equality gaps.
- ✓ We are in the process of developing capacity to gather and analyse complex monitoring information on all of our current and prospective employees. This exercise has been developed in partnership with staff groups, unions and through external consultation. The information gathered will inform our wider equalities work.

## Communication

The wider equality and diversity work that we carry out at SQA is only possible because staff and stakeholders work in partnership. We have developed a co-ordinated response and ensure that we use various ways of securing internal and external engagement.

With transparency and partnership sitting at the core of our work, we can continue to work towards the delivery of meaningful and ambitious action plans. As we have such an extensive range of stakeholders, it has been essential to develop and maintain a variety of communication techniques to tell people about:

1. SQA's equality framework internally and externally
2. Our equality schemes and actions plans
3. Our equality mainstreaming policy
4. Our equality impact assessment schedule

### In SQA:

- ◆ We have developed an equality and diversity section on our internal portal — a database application available to all staff — that contains procedural documents and information.
- ◆ We provide regular updates to staff through monthly newsletters.
- ◆ Equalities Officer attends business area team meetings.
- ◆ Equalities Officer attends induction events for new staff.

### Externally:

- ◆ We publish information in SQA's E-zine, which is sent to a wide range of stakeholders and interested parties.
- ◆ We have set up an Equalities page on our website ([www.sqa.org.uk](http://www.sqa.org.uk)).
- ◆ We reach out to customers via our network of dedicated Customer Support Managers who engage directly with our centres.
- ✓ Access to information on equality and diversity is centralised. Our equalities web page (launched in August 2007) acts as a hub for equality information, and forms part of our wider communication strategy. This page allows users to register their interest in becoming involved in the consultative processes emerging from our impact assessments. It also reports on our impact assessments, equality schemes and other relevant documents as they become available.
- ✓ Stakeholder engagement has taken place at a recent event held to consider the restructuring of the core skills communication units, and also

in the process to examine the redrafting of our equal opportunities monitoring form.

***‘There appears to be a real willingness to be flexible and open to change at SQA’<sup>2</sup>***

- ✓ We are trying to engage with our diverse range of stakeholders, including the publication of a leaflet that summarises the work we are embarking on. The leaflet includes a form for people to register their interest in becoming involved in the consultation processes emerging from our impact assessment schedule, and ensures that people outside SQA are offered the invitation to contribute to our wider equalities work. The enthusiastic response has allowed us to build an expanding database of interested parties who we can call on during consultations or stakeholder engagement events.

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<sup>2</sup> Participant at recent Core Skills communication framework stakeholder engagement event.

## What's next?

We will:

- ✓ Continue to promote the mainstreaming of equality into all organisational activity via the Schemes, action plans and the equality impact assessment process.
- ✓ Move towards a Single Equality Scheme which brings together equality schemes in the areas of disability, race and gender through a common framework with separate chapters on the issues in each of the three areas. Taking a more holistic approach to the protection and promotion of equalities will make our products sensitive to the specific needs of the communities we serve, while still ensuring that we meet our requirements under the legislation.
- ✓ Continue to align the equality schemes with our corporate operational plans, and build on the current infrastructure to monitor and sustain progress against the plans.
- ✓ Drive implementation of the equality mainstreaming policy.
- ✓ Further develop our involvement and consultation work — we will continue to develop new ways to engage people.
- ✓ See that our commitment to the delivery of equality of opportunity is progressively realised and informed by the findings of our impact assessments and the associated processes.
- ✓ Ensure that the Board and Executive Team reinforce their commitment to this agenda.

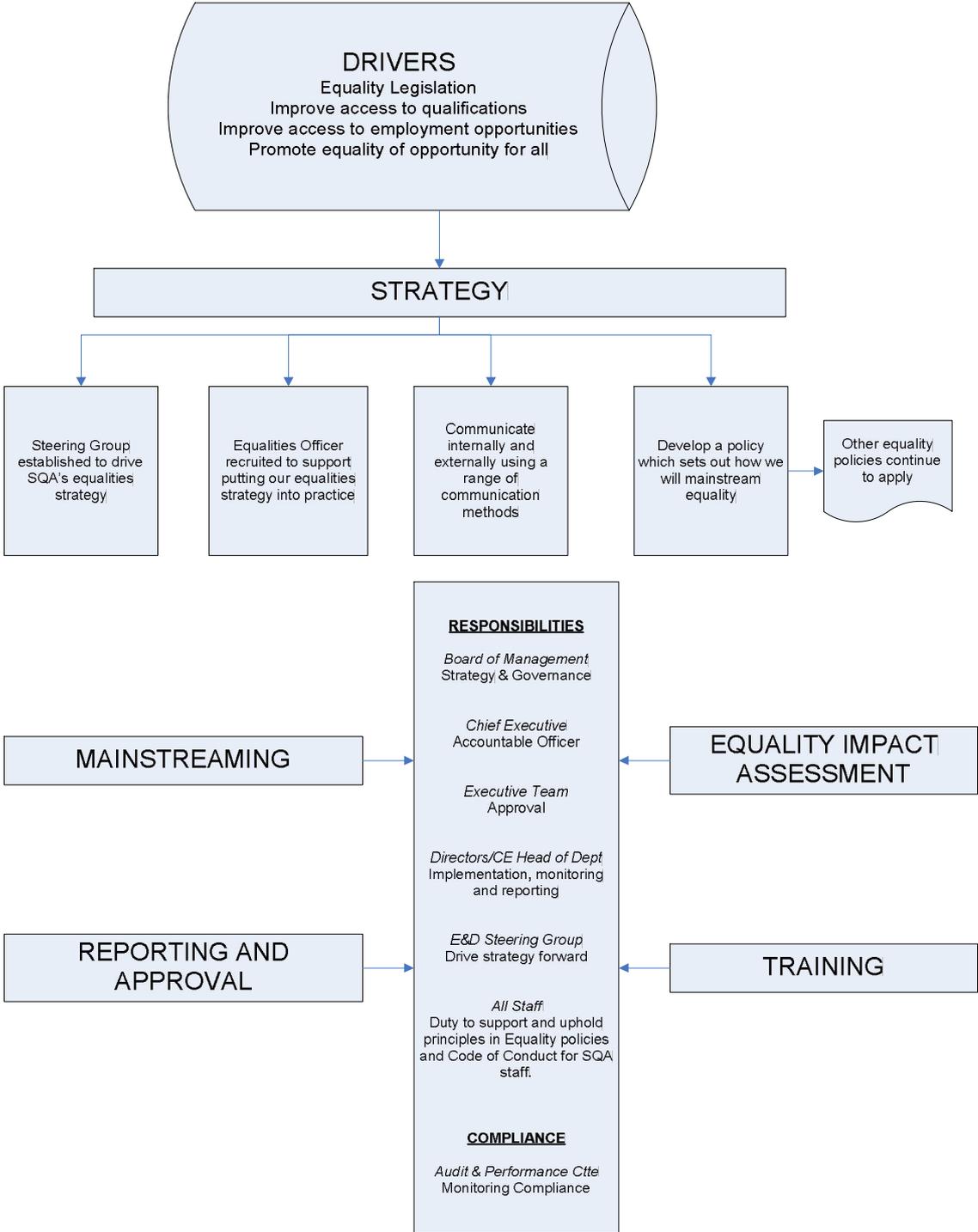
## Contacting SQA

We recognise that our equality schemes are part of our on-going equalities work. We welcome feedback and would be happy to receive your thoughts and concerns.

You can contact us by:

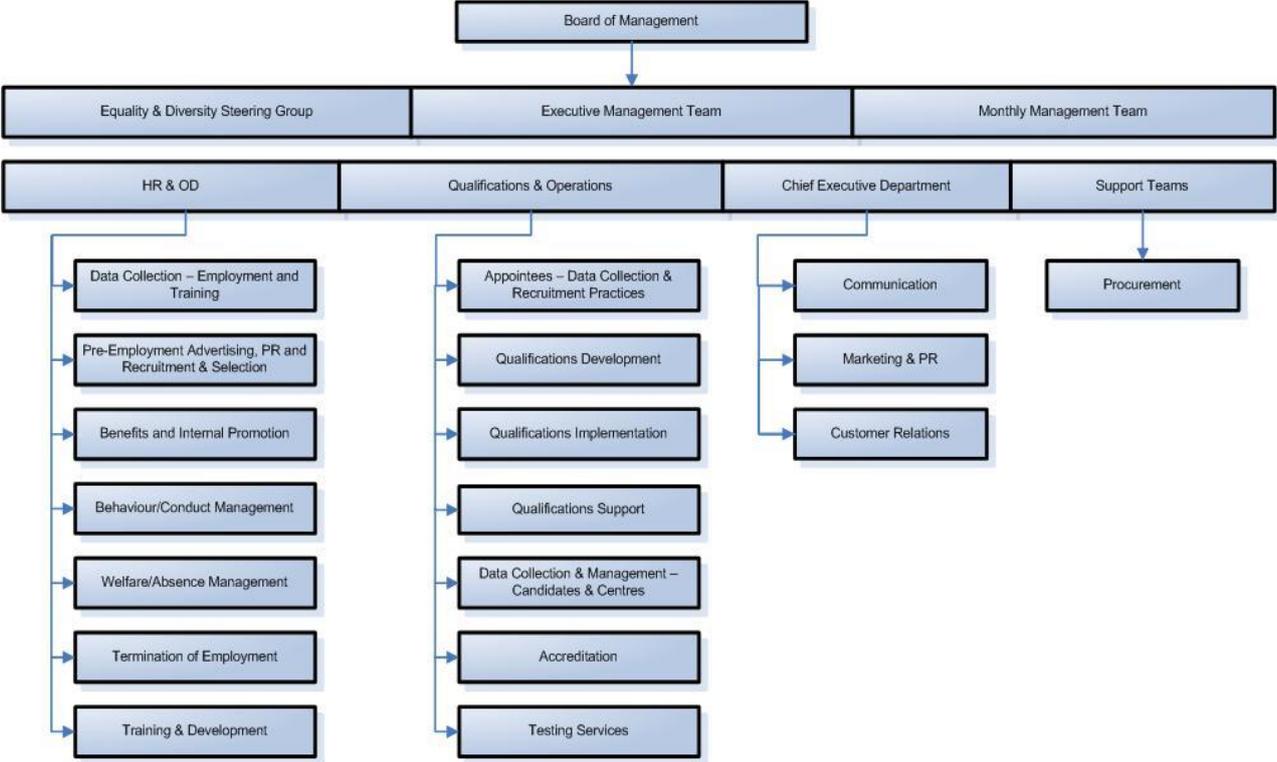
e-mail	<b><a href="mailto:equality@sqa.org.uk">equality@sqa.org.uk</a></b>
telephone	0845 213 5319
writing	Fiach OBroin-Molloy Equalities Officer Corporate Strategy and Governance Scottish Qualifications Authority The Optima Building 58 Robertson Street Glasgow G2 8DQ

# SQA's Equality Framework





# Scottish Qualifications Authority Key Functions Relevant to Equality



## **Actions and Outcomes**

Our achievements to date on our action plans are shown here.

### **Alternative formats**

***Develop a publishing portal and communicate availability of the range of alternative formats available to SQA staff who deal with requests from centres and customers.***

***Information on the availability of alternative formats is also to be published on our website to allow as wide an audience as possible to take advantage of this service.***

Ref: **DIS/OP8, DIS/OP7**

- ✓ The SQA publishing portal was launched in June 2007. The portal now contains useful guidance on the range of alternative formats available. The outcome of this has been to increase awareness of existing business practice and to capitalise on the potential to provide documents in a range of formats and languages depending on their nature and classification.
- ✓ Not only will staff be aware of the availability of alternative formats and language, but candidates, centres and wider stakeholders will be able to take advantage of this service, which will ensure that we are promoting equality of opportunity and access on the basis of Race, Gender and Disability.

### **Human Resources**

***Improve communication of HR policies, vacancies and procedures.***

Ref: **GEN/HR6, DIS/HR3, DIS/HR4**

- ✓ Work has progressed well in ensuring that matters such as our maternity and paternity leave policy, our complaints procedures, and our new performance management frameworks, are effectively communicated to the business. When on maternity and paternity leave, staff can now elect to be kept up to date with all vacancies so that they do not miss out on important opportunities of career progression and development.
- ✓ Increasing knowledge of and transparency in our processes, including our complaints procedures, ensures that people are aware of their rights and responsibilities and helps us to for fill our equality duties.
- ✓ Our Human Resources Department has been working closely with our publishing department to ensure that documents such as our equal opportunities monitoring form and our applications forms are more easily assessable and, where possible, are available in alternative formats.

### **Data collection**

#### **Ref: DIS/HR1 and GEN/HR1**

- ✓ We are on the cusp of two of our largest impact assessments. These will examine the types of information we gather and what we do with the information we gather. Gathering, analysing and acting on both qualitative and quantitative information is the only way we can ensure that we are effectively meeting our duties under the equalities legislation.
- ✓ We have worked hard and in consultation with staff, union representatives and prospective staff to revise our equal opportunities monitoring questionnaire and the accompanying supporting statement.
- ✓ So that we can carry out complex analysis of the information that we gather, we have been working with our software engineers to ensure that our systems have the capacity to store the information gathered and produce reports which help us to ensure that we are an equal opportunities employer.

### **Workers**

#### ***Emphasise importance of the DED to all staff, and explain SQA's role in promoting equality of opportunity and eliminating discrimination.***

- ✓ We have successfully completed this action, and the equality agenda continues to receive high level recognition and senior management buy-in by featuring in all staff briefings and through regular papers to our monthly management team meetings.
- ✓ Ensuring that equalities actions are supported by the senior management will continue to ensure that we can follow through on all of the actions outlined on our action plans.