



# **Scottish Qualifications Authority Children's Rights Report**

**April 2020 to April 2023**

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## Foreword

SQA has an important role to play in supporting the Scottish Government's vision to embed children's rights in all aspects of society. I am delighted to introduce SQA's second full Children's Rights Report, covering 2020 to 2023, which demonstrates our commitment and priorities.

Every child has the right to education and while SQA does not determine the right to education in Scotland, we do have a responsibility to provide assessment and certification of qualifications. With this responsibility, we never lose sight of the fact that we can shape decisions that will positively impact the lives of children and young people in Scotland.

We embed our values — progressive, enabling, and trusted — in all our work. Embedding children's rights is imperative to meeting these values, allowing us to consider children's rights in everything we do.

Education reform and the organisation that will replace SQA brings further opportunities for change and for continuing to ensure that children and their rights are at the heart of the education system. We will play a full and positive role in the reform process that is underway and work towards developing a Children's Rights Framework for the new organisation building on that for SQA.

This report highlights our commitment to the advancement of children's rights in Scotland. It demonstrates the dedication and enthusiasm of SQA employees to recognise, respect and promote children's rights.

We are mindful that young people are our future adults, and we aim to help them achieve their full potential, bringing benefits to all of us and to the communities we live in.

**Fiona Robertson**  
**SQA Chief Executive**

## About SQA

As Scotland's accreditation and awarding body, SQA provides products, services, skills, training and education — all of which have a positive impact on individuals, organisations and society. We embed our values — progressive, enabling, and trusted — in all our work.

Our purpose is to help individuals fulfil their full potential while maintaining standards across Scottish education. We are an executive non-departmental public body that reports to Scottish Ministers and the Scottish Parliament established under the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. SQA is sponsored by the Scottish Government's Education Reform Directorate.

Our remit and function are outlined in the amended Scottish Qualifications Act 2002. With a current staff of approximately 1,000 based in Glasgow and Dalkeith, SQA engages with learners, schools, colleges and training providers across Scotland, the rest of the UK and internationally. We develop, maintain and improve a framework of qualifications, and set and maintain standards for many other awarding bodies and accredited qualifications.

SQA Accreditation:

- ◆ accredits qualifications other than degrees
- ◆ approves and quality-assures awarding bodies that plan to enter people for these qualifications

As an accrediting body, SQA sets and maintains standards for many other awarding bodies, and for accredited qualifications such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications, which provide evidence that learners can do their jobs well. (These can be studied in colleges or in the workplace.) This role is similar to the role carried out by Ofqual in other parts of the UK.

As the Scottish qualifications' regulator, the accreditation function is branded as SQA Accreditation to minimise any potential confusion with the awarding function of SQA.

SQA (awarding body):

- ◆ devises and develops qualifications
- ◆ validates qualifications (ensures they are well written and meet the needs of learners and teaching practitioners) and reviews qualifications to ensure they are up to date
- ◆ arranges for, assists in, and carries out, the assessment of learners taking SQA qualifications
- ◆ quality-assures education and training establishments that offer SQA qualifications
- ◆ issues certificates to learners

We help people to achieve and fulfil their potential by providing them with credible recognition of the skills and knowledge they have demonstrated, which in turn supports their choices in life and work. SQA provides opportunities for success for thousands of learners each year, positively impacting on them, their families and on society.

# Introduction

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 places a duty on a range of public authorities to report, 'as soon as practicable' after the end of each three-year period, the steps they have taken to secure better or further effect the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This is SQA's second full Children's Rights Report and covers the period April 2020 to April 2023. Our previous report (2017–20) and our proactive interim report (covering the period 2020–22), can be accessed [from our Children's Rights Reports web page](#).

## What is the UNCRC?

The [UN Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) is the internationally mandated children's rights treaty that informs our strategies and programmes. It sets out the rights that all children and young people in the UK have and outlines what children need to give them the best chance of growing up happy, healthy and safe. It also explains how adults and governments should work together to make sure all children can access all their rights. The UNCRC defines the child as a person under 18 years of age. The UNCRC also applies to care-experienced young people and care leavers up to the age of 26.

Abbreviations in this report:

AREP	Anti-Racism in Education Programme
CAB	Curriculum and Assessment Board
(CALL Scotland)	Computer-Assisted Language Learning Scotland
CfE	Curriculum for Excellence
CRWIA	Children's rights and wellbeing impact assessment
DSDAS	Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland
DPIA	Data protection impact assessment
EqIA	Equality impact assessments
EECCS	Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIRFEC	Getting It Right For Every Child
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender
NQ	National Qualifications
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
SAR	Subject access request
SYP	Scottish Youth Parliament
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admission Service
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

## UNCRC clusters

SQA has used the cluster approach to structure this report, in line with [Scottish Government UNCRC guidance](#). Using the UNCRC clusters is an internationally recognised approach to the implementation, monitoring and reporting of children's rights. The clusters allow SQA to address articles that deal with related children's rights issues under one heading.

The Scottish Government have summarised the UNCRC 54 articles into 8 themed 'Clusters', which cover a wide variety of rights. Examples are provided of SQA activities under each of the clusters as well as information on what we plan to do next.

- Cluster 1: General measures of implementation
- Cluster 2: UNCRC general principles
- Cluster 3: Civil rights and freedoms
- Cluster 4: Violence Against Children
- Cluster 5: Family environment and alternative care
- Cluster 6: Basic health and welfare
- Cluster 7: Education, leisure and culture
- Cluster 8: Special protection measures

### In line with our values

We embed our values — progressive, enabling, and trusted — in all our work. SQA's values define who we are and the high standards that we expect. These values promote a culture where our employees and stakeholders feel that they belong and that they are valued, included, and respected. Embedding children's rights is imperative to delivering on these values, allowing us to consider children's rights in everything we do.

#### **Progressive: We challenge the status quo and embrace new ideas and ways of working**

An inclusive and welcoming culture, where people are encouraged to think differently and bring new ideas to the table is promoted within SQA. By truly listening and giving equity of voice people feel valued, allowing us to seek out best practice and embrace change.

SQA realises that in order to embed children's rights in our work we need to engage with children and young people themselves and to listen to their journey. We need to ensure that children's rights aren't seen as the responsibility of one individual, team or directorate but that we work across all directorates to meet our children's rights responsibilities.

We engage with children and young people in a variety of ways and are always looking to expand on this creatively.

#### **Trusted: We are open and transparent in our communication and decision-making**

We endeavour to make evidence-based decisions, engaging with young people as part of this process. Children and young people, and those with protected characteristics, are at the centre of decision-making about our products and services. We use tools such as equality impact assessments and children rights and wellbeing impact assessments to scrutinise 'the way things have always been done' to make changes where required.

Although it is not always possible to put in place requests from children and young people, particularly when competing and conflicting needs arise from SQA's statutory responsibilities and the needs of different stakeholders, we will always ensure to be transparent when we cannot do something and give reasons for this, including what has been considered when reaching the decision.

We have a robust equality impact assessment process in place and continue to work towards aligning this process with children's rights and wellbeing impact assessments.

**Enabling: We set and uphold high standards of behaviour in line with our values**

SQA understands the importance of continuing to invest in developing our leaders and employees so that they fully understand the vital role they play in embedding children's rights considerations into all processes and tasks.

This includes taking accountability for our actions and words and challenging stereotypes about children and young people and their collective and individual journeys.

Partnership is at the core of how we work. We value differences of views, experiences and backgrounds — both inside and outwith SQA.

All employees have a role to play in embedding children's rights and championing our values, both to colleagues and our young stakeholders.

We are working with our leaders and employees to enable understanding of the impactful role they play and will continue to explore opportunities to carry on this important work.

## **Definition of the child**

Article 1 of the UNCRC defines a child as anyone under the age of 18. This is the case unless the child lives in a place where the law states that a child becomes an adult at an earlier age. In Scotland, we consider people to be adults at different ages, depending on the context. However, for the purposes of the UNCRC and the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, people become adults at the age of 18.



## **Cluster 1: General measures of implementation**

This cluster focuses on what government is expected to do to implement the UNCRC through law, policy and decisions which impact on children. It applies to legal measures (through legislation). It also applies to non-legal measures which progress implementation of the convention including national strategies and action plans; resource allocation and monitoring; children's rights training, awareness-raising, and capacity-building; development and collection of data on children's lives; collaboration with all sectors including children.

### **Children's Rights Steering Group**

SQA recently formed a Children's Rights Steering Group which includes representatives from across the organisation. The group provides a forum for discussion, for sharing best practice and co-ordinating communications relating to children's rights. It also promotes and advocates increased organisational understanding of children's rights so that we can embed a right's-based approach in our policy, practice and decision-making.

### **Equality impact assessments (EqIAs)**

Under the Equality Act 2010, SQA considers the impact our policies have on people with protected characteristics. The protected characteristics are age, ethnicity, religion, sex, sexual orientation, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage/civil partnership and pregnancy/maternity. With age being one of the protected characteristics, our EqIAs need to consider the impact of our policies on children and young people. Although care experience is not a protected characteristic, our EqIA process also considers the potential impacts of children and young people who are care experienced.

The EqIA is an effective tool for mainstreaming equality. By ensuring that all policies have equality impacts identified we will ensure SQA's policies and procedures are equitable and that we are considering impacts, both positive and negative on children and young people. By training policy owners and encouraging them to engage with the EqIA process, we are building expertise throughout the organisation. By monitoring actions from EqIAs, we are ensuring that there are tangible benefits and positive impacts, owned by staff across the organisation.

An example of this is SQA's Complaints Handling procedure. The procedure itself is set out by the Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman, however, how SQA delivers that procedure to suit its stakeholders is shaped by their needs. The impact assessment identified that given a key proportion of SQA's learners are children and young people, there were barriers to submitting complaints directly to SQA if they were required to represent themselves. The policy includes a provision for a complaint to be supported by a third party, including a responsible adult nominated by the child or young person, to further equality of opportunity and the right to be heard.

### **Children's rights and wellbeing impact assessments**

Children's rights and wellbeing impact assessments (CRWIAs) are an effective tool for ensuring that the impacts on the rights of children and young people are considered in SQA's policies and practices.

For example the CRWIA for [Arrangements for Assessing National Qualifications in 2023](#) was developed to demonstrate the considerations taken to inform decision-making regarding the support and services for 2022–23 National Qualifications, including modifications to course assessment, 2023 Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) and 2023 Appeals Service.

SQA supports lifelong learning and awards qualifications to learners of all ages, but many learners taking SQA-graded National Courses are aged 15, 16 or 17 and identify as children and young people.

In October 2022, the National Qualifications Policy Team carried out engagement activities on the arrangements for the assessment of National Courses in 2022–23 with learners, parents and carers, practitioners, SQA qualifications teams, National Qualification support teams, SQA's Advisory Council, SQA's Qualifications Committee, the NQ2023 Working Group and the NQ2023 Strategic Group. This was a key consideration when developing the approach to the 2023 Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service and 2023 Appeals Service to ensure the services were fair and equitable for all children and young people.

[CRWIA for 2023–24 National Qualifications Course Modifications](#) considered the views of over 2,000 children and young people who participated in SQA's 2022 National Qualifications Evaluation research project. The feedback was considered alongside other evidence available to SQA when reaching the decision of whether to retain course modifications to National Courses in 2023–24. The [report from this research](#) was published in June 2023.

## **Children's rights training**

Understanding the needs of children and young people is essential to ensuring that there is no potential discrimination and that we are upholding children's rights in our policy, practice and decision-making.

SQA's children's rights training was developed, aiming to:

- ◆ provide an overview of SQA's responsibilities relating to children's rights under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014
- ◆ outline the duties that will be imposed on SQA by the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill
- ◆ explain the UNCRC and the provisions that may be of most relevance to SQA
- ◆ give a briefing on how the UNCRC has been dealt with by the Scottish courts to date
- ◆ explain of the role and powers of the Children and Young People Commissioner Scotland

The session took place on 13 September 2023 and was recorded and made available on the SQA intranet accompanied by a 'points for consideration' learning note that can be completed individually and/or collectively within a team. The points asked colleagues to reflect on their knowledge and awareness of children's rights and to consider how they relate to the role and remit of their team, directorate and SQA as a whole.

## **Corporate parenting**

We aim to ensure that employees are aware of SQA's duties as a corporate parent and that they understand the lifelong impact of care experience. Our corporate induction programme includes information about SQA's corporate parenting responsibilities, commitments, and the services we offer to support care-experienced young people.

Our online corporate parenting training, available to all staff on our SQA Academy site, emphasises how important this role is to SQA. The training encourages staff to promote the wellbeing of care-experienced young people through the work they do, to consider possible links with their role and the implications for care-experienced young people, and to think about what they can change in their work to ensure that care-experienced young people are being supported.

Our online module is currently being updated. We have plans in place to roll out revised training to all staff in 2023–24 and will explore bespoke training for different teams across SQA.

In November 2020, Who Cares? Scotland's Education and Training Team delivered detailed virtual training to SQA's Corporate Parenting Steering Group (a group that has responsibility in SQA for the review, implementation, monitoring and reporting of SQA's [corporate parenting commitments](#)). The training and facilitated discussion have supported work to review and update SQA's corporate parenting commitments and action plans. This work is ongoing and will inform the work to develop our next Corporate Parenting Plan 2023–26.

## **Designing inclusive assessments**

Employees and appointees are encouraged to complete the SQA Academy course on designing inclusive assessments. This course provides guidance, with exemplars, on how to design assessments to be as accessible and inclusive as possible, including the use of language. A related assessment arrangements course on SQA Academy was finalised in November 2020.

## **Other training**

SQA employees attended YouthLink Scotland training on recognising and realising children's rights, and Together: Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights training on data collection, child's rights impact assessments, and rights-based budgeting.

Part of the planning for the future is to ensure we build and upskill in relation to Learning for Sustainability and learner entitlement.

## Cluster 2: General Principles of the UNCRC

There are four articles in the convention that are seen as special. These are known as the 'General Principles' and they help to interpret all the other articles and play a fundamental role in realising all the rights in the convention for all children.

UNCRC General Principles are:

- ◆ Non-discrimination (Article 2)
- ◆ Best interest of the child (Article 3)
- ◆ Right to life survival and development (Article 6)
- ◆ Right to be heard (Article 12)

### Non-discrimination (Article 2)

Every child has rights *'without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status'* (Article 2).

The principle and practice of non-discrimination is considered in how we deliver our services.

The Public Sector Equality Duty requires SQA to review policies and activities to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics.

SQA's commitment to embedding equalities in all aspects of the development of the qualifications systems is reflected in Governing Principle 7 of our Code of Practice, which states, *'SQA will ensure that all qualifications and assessments are as fair and accessible as possible and that the needs of candidates are met in the administration of its assessments'*.

The following are examples of work that demonstrate this commitment.

#### **Assessment arrangements and reasonable adjustments**

Some children and young people who study our qualifications may need support when accessing an assessment. This might be because of a physical difficulty (including medical or sensory difficulty), a behavioural or mental health difficulty, or a learning difficulty.

Under the Equality Act (2010), SQA provides guidance to centres to ensure assessment arrangements are provided to disabled children and young people and/or those with additional support needs to access our qualifications and to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in assessments. In addition, SQA has a duty to consider reasonable adjustments based on the needs of the individual disabled children and young people and/or those with additional support needs. Under [section 96\(7\) of the Equality Act \(2010\)](#), it is also clear that there are situations where we should not make adjustments to our qualifications. In 2023, 91,880 assessment arrangement requests were submitted to SQA on behalf of 28,345 learners. This is an increase from 2019 in which 62,505 assessment arrangement requests were submitted on behalf of 20,160 learners.

We have advised schools, colleges and training providers to think about the specific needs of the individual disabled child or young person who may require assessment arrangements for each subject and level. This is because each child or young person is different — even if a learner has the same type of identified difficulty as their peer, they may not need the same type of support. This is what we call a ‘needs-led’ approach. This is important because it means, for example, that a child or young person may need to use a laptop or computer to type their answers in English where there is a need to write a lot, but it may not be suitable in Mathematics where learners need to show their mathematical working and write formulas.

Examples of this are:

- ◆ adapted and digital papers
- ◆ live presentation of someone reading out a transcript to allow d/Deaf children and young people to access a listening exam
- ◆ reading assistance
- ◆ writing assistance
- ◆ using ICT
- ◆ using sign language in exams
- ◆ changes to the assessment environment and timing, such as breaks, extra time or separate accommodation

There is further [information around assessment arrangements for children and young people](#) on our website.

### **Equality and anti-racism in education**

Anti-racism is now a priority within Scottish education. Pupils, parents and educators alike have stressed the importance of widening the curriculum and designing education environments that are free from racism. As a result, the Scottish Government has created the [Anti-Racism in Education Programme](#) (AREP) which sets out to implement this change. One important aspect of how the AREP works is the acknowledgement of lived experience as integral to informing decisions within the group. There are representatives from Intercultural Youth Scotland and Scottish Youth Parliament to ensure the youth voice is brought forward. SQA and such partners are key drivers of the programme, and a specific SQA Anti-racist Education Plan is in place. The actions include raising awareness of anti-racism through training, collation of data to make evidence-based decisions, engaging with SQA employee networks, and considering our recruitment practices.

Understanding how racism shows up in policy, procedures and products is essential to engaging with this work and it is understood that this requires long-term effort. SQA has a dedicated research and policy manager who drives this the anti-racist education work and we have recently engaged our director of communications as a sponsor for anti-racist education.

### **Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) inclusive education**

Since 2021, Scotland has been advancing LGBT inclusive education in all schools through a phased implementation approach. The national [Implementation and Evaluation Toolkit](#) provides a structured pathway for schools to implement LGBT inclusive education effectively. The [lgbteducation.scot](#) platform supports teachers to do this through the

provision of professional learning opportunities and the availability of cross-curricular teaching.

SQA is a member of the LGBT Inclusive Education Implementation Group which was established to take forward the recommendations of a report developed by the LGBT Inclusive Education Working Group in November 2018.

The Scottish Government accepted all 33 recommendations of the report.

The LGBTI Inclusive Education Working Group recommendations included:

- ◆ to improve LGBTI inclusion
- ◆ improvement of practice and guidance for teachers
- ◆ provision of professional learning for current and future teachers
- ◆ monitoring and school inspections of LGBTI inclusion
- ◆ the recording of incidents of LGBTI bullying in schools

Recommendation 15 is specific to SQA:

*'In recognising the centrality of national qualifications in shaping educational discourse, that SQA and Education Scotland work with the Implementation Group to ensure appropriate inclusion of LGBT matters in the development of new or adapted course specifications, and relevant guidance, across the curriculum.'*

Our progress to date:

SQA is committed to incorporating LGBT matters in new and revised National Courses. This commitment is driven by Recommendation 15 of the LGBT Inclusive Education Working Group report to the Scottish Ministers.

SQA has identified that this can be achieved in a number of ways:

- ◆ Embedding LGBT matters in the course specification of relevant National Courses will mean that this is mandatory assessable content.
- ◆ Including LGBT related texts / stimulus in question papers, where appropriate.
- ◆ Highlighting where there are opportunities through personalisation and choice for learners to engage with LGBT issues in their coursework assessment.

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent recovery has prevented SQA from progressing with the consideration of including LGBT content as part of its normal qualification review cycle.

There are current National Courses that candidates, through personalisation and choice, would be able to select a theme or topic related to LGBT issues as the basis of their coursework assessment.

- ◆ English subject pages
- ◆ Drama subject pages

- ◆ Dance subject pages
- ◆ Art and Design subject pages
- ◆ Photography subject pages
- ◆ Sociology subject pages

### **Corporate parenting**

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 defines corporate parenting as *‘the formal and local partnerships between all services responsible for working together to meet the needs of looked after children, young people and care leavers’*. The 2014 Act introduced new duties and responsibilities for Scottish public bodies defined as corporate parents, effective from April 2015. SQA remains an active and committed corporate parent and we have demonstrated our commitment to corporate parenting since March 2020:

- ◆ Who Cares? Scotland delivered training to SQA’s Corporate Parenting Steering Group in November 2020.
- ◆ We launched a one-year Business and Administration Modern Apprenticeship programme in January 2021. (The new programme is inclusive for all young people aged between 16 and 19 years old and up to age 29 for any young person that is care experienced. We made changes to SQA’s recruitment process to ensure it is inclusive and accessible to all applicants. Opportunities were promoted via various networks to reach as many care-experienced young people as possible.)
- ◆ The launch of SQA’s Virtual Work Experience Placement in 2022. (This is a certified Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) level 4 unit. We will liaise with both MCR Pathways and Developing the Young Workforce to ensure these opportunities are promoted to care-experienced young people.)
- ◆ We are working to revise and update our corporate parenting commitments.

We appreciate that many care-experienced young people do not have a network of support in their home life and for that reason we made a commitment in 2015 to hold an annual celebration event for care-experienced learners on results day in August each year. These events were held in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways to celebrate with a group of care-experienced learners as they opened their results. These events have been an excellent way to give young people a platform to have their achievements recognised. We were disappointed not to be able to host in-person results day events in August 2020, 2021 or 2022 due to the impact of the pandemic and ongoing restrictions.

On Results Day 2020, we invited colleagues across SQA to send notes of congratulations and we created a [YouTube video](#) to share with care-experienced young people across Scotland.

In [August 2021](#), and [August 2022](#), we marked the achievements of care-experienced learners — in what was another challenging few years for all learners — through a congratulatory video message from SQA staff and their families, the Cabinet Secretary for Education & Skills, and representatives from Who Cares? Scotland and MCR Pathways. Read more about [SQA’s virtual results day celebration for care-experienced learners](#).

Plans are being put in place to hold an in-person event during 2023–24. This event will allow us to celebrate the achievements of all care-experienced learners, across all qualifications,

and to respond to feedback we received from members of Who Cares? Scotland's National Representative Body, and their members, who asked us not to only focus on National Qualifications results in August every year.

### **Gaelic language**

To help secure a sustainable future for Gaelic in a multilingual Scotland, SQA is committed to the objectives set out in the National Plan for Gaelic and the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005, which recognises Gaelic as an official language of Scotland.

In our work, SQA seeks to:

- ◆ encourage the increased use of Gaelic
- ◆ promote the acquisition and learning of Gaelic
- ◆ promote a positive image of Gaelic

SQA recognises that Gaelic is an integral part of Scotland's heritage, national identity and cultural life, and that education plays a vital role in minority language revitalisation.

We support Gaelic-medium education (GME), where a child's education is delivered through the medium of Gaelic, through our [Gaelic Language Plan 2022–25](#). The plan sets out how we will use Gaelic in our functions, how we will enable the use of Gaelic when communicating with the public and key partners, and how we will promote and develop Gaelic. We aim to ensure that Gaelic is considered from the outset of new qualification development and the continuous review of the current Gaelic exam provision. This has included engagement on Gaelic through Professor Ken Muir's Review.

To ensure progress is being made against the commitments outlined in SQA's Gaelic Language Plan, we have established a Gaelic Language Plan Implementation and Monitoring Group. This group monitors actions taken throughout the duration of this plan. Progression reports are delivered internally, as well as an annual monitoring report made to Bòrd na Gàidhlig.

### **Learning for Sustainability**

The newly refreshed Scottish Government Learning for Sustainability (LfS) Action Plan, '[Target 2030' A movement for people, planet and prosperity Scotland's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023-2030](#), now incorporates a specific focus on children's rights and UNCRC.

LfS is a cross-curricular entitlement for all learners, linking together themes of sustainable development education, social justice, climate change, global citizenship, children's rights, equality and outdoor learning. All of this is underpinned by the [17 UN Sustainable Development Goals](#). This brings together the social, economic and environmental challenges we all face and how we need to collaborate to address these including, for example, socio-economic inequality.

The LfS Action Plan states that making LfS a key driver in the future of Scottish education will not only enable us to heed the call to action from learners but will allow us to achieve much more besides. All of our policy ambitions in relation to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, climate



and net zero, biodiversity, circular economy, and economic and social transformation can only be delivered with the commitment of Scotland's people, supported throughout their education.

### **Best interest of the child (Article 3)**

*'In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.'*

The Scottish Government is reforming Scotland's education system and the way qualifications are provided. The Reform Programme contains a number of distinct but connected strands:

- ◆ The creation of the new qualifications body, independent inspectorate, and national education agency.
- ◆ The review of qualifications and assessment led by Professor Louise Hayward.
- ◆ The national discussion on the future vision for education.
- ◆ The review of skills delivery led by James Withers.

The Scottish Government will respond to the Hayward and Withers reviews in autumn 2023. These responses will inform the ongoing education reform programme, which will include the establishment of a new qualifications body that will replace SQA. This will bring further opportunities for change and for continuing to ensure that children and their rights are at the heart of the education system.

In the meantime, SQA will continue to deliver for learners, schools, colleges, and its other customers, while working with others to ensure a smooth transition to the new qualifications body.

### **Curriculum and Assessment Board SQA**

SQA participates in the Curriculum and Assessment Board (CAB) sub-group on children's rights in Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). The sub-group will review Scotland's curriculum framework and will make recommendations to the CAB for relevant changes to that framework in light of the Scottish Government's commitment to incorporate the UNCRC into Scots law.

For children and young people to fully access and defend their rights and those of others, they must first know what they are and what that means in the context of their day-to-day lives. Throughout engagement on the UNCRC Incorporation (Scotland) Bill there have been calls for children's rights to be included as a fundamental part of the curriculum so that children are aware of the UNCRC and other rights protections; what this means for their day-to-day lives; how to act to promote rights; and how they might challenge perceived breaches of their rights.

A range of opportunities exists to amend curriculum content to ensure that it better aligns with the provisions of the UNCRC and ultimately better promotes children's rights. This would also better align CfE with Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC).

An initial assessment of curriculum content as conducted by the sub-group shows that CfE includes outcomes that explicitly link rights to responsibilities. There is a range of opportunities to amend curriculum content to ensure that it better aligns with the provisions of the UNCRC and ultimately better promotes children's rights.

Recommendations have been made to the CAB which indicate how Scotland's curriculum framework could be strengthened to improve the way that it recognises, supports and enhances children's rights.

### **Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service and Appeals 2023**

The exceptional circumstances service is available for children and young people who are unable to attend an exam due to a reason beyond their control, such as a medical condition or bereavement, or who are affected by disruption on the day of the exam as reported by the chief invigilator. The Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service will involve SQA appointees — practising teachers and lecturers — reviewing alternative assessment evidence that learners have completed through the year alongside any attempted coursework and exam scripts. Schools, colleges and training providers were required to send alternative academic evidence to SQA that was then judged against national standards.

The free Appeals 2023 service will give all children and young people the right to request a review of their marked exam scripts and any associated coursework.

Evidence and engagement were at the heart of the decision-making process for 2023 for SQA to make recommendations that were in the best interests of children and young people across Scotland. The services have been developed following an [extensive evaluation of the exams and appeals services](#) that were in place in 2022, with more than 3,500 learners, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and principal assessors feeding back their views and experiences.

The Policy, Analysis and Standards Equalities Team completed several equalities impact assessments and CRWIAs, working with colleagues across SQA, on elements of the arrangements around assessment of National Qualifications in 2023.

Following careful consideration of those views, and consultation with stakeholders and users on options for 2023, the Appeals 2023 service had no requirement for alternative assessment evidence to be submitted by centres. Instead, children and young people who believed their final grade was incorrect, following discussions with their centres, were able to request a review of their SQA-marked exams and coursework.

### **Malpractice in Higher National Qualifications and Vocational Qualifications**

Most individuals who access Higher National and Vocational Qualifications are over 18 but children and young people can still fall under this policy. The equality impact assessment highlighted the stress and pressure involved in a malpractice investigation and that children may not be able to robustly represent themselves in these situations. As a result, the guidance was updated to ensure that a candidate under the age of 18 was accompanied by an adult during such investigations.

## Right to life survival and development (Article 6)

Development in its broadest sense means embracing the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, psychological and social development.

### Responsible Business Team

SQA makes a difference to the communities it serves through a shared understanding and a sense of being a responsible business that delivers and sustains a positive impact on its customers and communities. As a responsible business, our objectives are to create positive changes and make valuable contributions that support our local communities, environment, customers, and employees.

Our Responsible Business Team looks after the operational delivery of SQA's Responsible Business Strategy and associated Giving Something Back initiatives. SQA staff get involved throughout the year across a variety of activities to 'give something back' to our local communities. Developments have been made to ensure that our community support initiatives fit with the new hybrid working model for colleagues and young people venturing into the world of work. We have also started to match the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to these opportunities.

Staff can use up to 21 hours per year to volunteer. Some examples of these are:

[ApparelXchange](#) — a social enterprise dedicated to re-use, repair and recycle children's and teen clothing. Their mission is to reduce the impact of clothing on our planet. Volunteering time helps ApparelXchange to provide clothing to families most in need across Glasgow.

[Launch Foods](#) — a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on maximising food surplus by feeding children free hot nutritious food after their school day and during holidays.

[Merry-Go-Round](#) — a community venture selling 'pre-loved' children's goods. A contribution of volunteering time helps Merry-Go-Round to distribute free essential children's goods to families most in need across Glasgow.

[MCR Pathways](#) — connects disadvantaged, often care-experienced, young people with volunteer mentors to help them find, grow and use their talents. For these young people it can be difficult to do well in school when home life is chaotic. Mentoring provides the extra support and encouragement that can help these young people reach their full potential.

[Active Schools Midlothian](#) — Supporting the delivery of sports and physical activity within a school or other venue. Sessions are based on the experience of the volunteer and the needs of the young people to encourage and promote a healthy life.

[Who Cares? Scotland Birthday Card Writing](#) — Volunteers have the opportunity to share a lovely birthday message with care-experienced young people on their special day.

### Young Talent Strategy

Since November 2021, we have established a Young Talent Strategy based around our Young Persons' Guarantee, which promises that we will do everything we can to source, recruit, develop and retain young talent to:

- ◆ support the Scottish Government’s Young Person’s Guarantee initiative
- ◆ provide work experience to prepare young people for the world of work, with additional opportunities for young people with barriers to work such as a vocational apprentice programme with no entry requirements and additional internship opportunities with no academic entry requirements
- ◆ ensure no young person is left behind in the economic recovery and impact of COVID-19. This specifically includes disabled young people and care-experienced young people, and drives our decision to work with partner agencies such as the Robertson Trust, Inclusion Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland in providing internships, work experience and apprentice opportunities. We use the strategy to advance opportunities for young disabled people and young care-experienced people to join the organisation

With the launch of the Young Talent Strategy, we are sharing success stories from the existing young talent within SQA on our intranet site.

### **Modern Apprenticeships**

We continued the successful Modern Apprenticeships programme supporting six one-year apprentices who completed their programme in January 2022 — four stayed with SQA and progressed to higher-grade roles. We later hired two more Modern Apprentices, who are due to complete in August 2023. We continue to offer SVQ Business and Admin at SCQF level 6 and an HNC in Business, as well as exposure to different business areas and work activities throughout the programme.

We also launched a new internship programme in April 2021. This programme supports our Young Talent route with opportunities to join SQA for placements ranging from six weeks to 12 months in a directorate or specific business area. Placements are suitable for university and college students in a sandwich year or as a summer placement; and for graduates looking to gain work experience or those just finished education or further education and entering the workplace for the first time.

We work with academic and social responsibility partners to support the programme, including the Robertson Trust, Enable Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, Developing the Young Workforce, and further education institutions. In February and March 2023, we advertised four more Young Talent Business and Administration internships, one of which was in our Corporate Office.

### **Career Ready**

SQA is working in partnership with [Career Ready](#) and recently welcomed our second group of interns for their SQA work experience.

Career Ready is a social mobility charity that connects young people to the world of work through internships and mentoring partnerships.

As an employer committed to the Young Persons Guarantee and developing Scotland's young workforce, this partnership is a great addition to the routes available for young talent to join SQA, experience the world of work, and find support and growth for their career ambitions.

## **Right to be heard (Article 12)**

*‘Every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.’*

Across the education system we have a common goal: to inspire learners and help them succeed. To ensure SQA can continue to deliver appropriate products and services, we must place the needs of the learner at the centre of our organisation.

Children and young people bring a unique perspective to our work. They are active within the education system and are directly impacted by the decisions we make. By better understanding the challenges and opportunities they face, we will seek to make improvements and enhance the learner experience in Scotland where we can.

We can give learners a voice, listen to them and, where possible, act on their insight for the benefit of all.

The views of over 2,000 children and young people were considered in SQA’s 2022 National Qualifications Evaluation research project and the final [report from this research](#) was published in June 2023. SQA’s Policy, Analysis and Standards Equalities Team will be carrying out further research with children and young people to ensure their needs are considered in the review of existing policies and procedures. This includes engaging with disabled children and young people and/or those with additional support needs and listening to their experiences with requesting and receiving assessment arrangements for external assessments, but also understanding how ICT devices are currently used in teaching and learning environments. SQA’s Policy, Analysis and Standards Equalities Team intends to continue engaging with children and young people in equalities research to ensure the experiences and voices of those with a range of protected characteristics are heard and their needs considered.

### **Learner Engagement, Aspiration and Strategic Intent**

SQA Learner Engagement, Aspiration and Strategic Intent was developed in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Scottish Government National Outcomes, SQA’s Performance Framework and its Corporate Plan, plus feedback from organisations representing young people.

The strategy built upon existing communication and engagement with parents and carers to ensure SQA stands side by side with young people. It sets out the importance of learner engagement and the opportunities for further engagement.

### **UNCRC participation rights**

To support the participation rights set out by the UNCRC Bill, SQA needs to encourage two-way communication and provide opportunities for learners to participate in discussions affecting their future.

To ensure participation is effective for both learners and SQA, this strategy recommends using the [Seven Golden Rules for Participation](#) as set out by the Children and Young People’s Commissioner.

The rules are designed to help anyone working with, and for, children and young people. Their purpose is to remind adults of what participation means from the point of view of children and young people, and to encourage children and young people to think about what they need from adults to support them to participate. We will seek to use these as a guide to inform and help shape how our engagement with learners will look and feel.

To further support colleagues, an Engagement Framework was developed in line with the Golden Rules for Participation. The framework will help teams across SQA identify the level of engagement they require for their project and how it should look and feel from a young person's perspective.

### **Learner engagement**

In October 2020 SQA established a monthly Learner Panel in conjunction with Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP). The panel is made up of a range of learners, including members of SYP and college student representatives. SQA has sought the views of the panel on a range of issues relating to the awarding of qualifications throughout the pandemic including the Alternative Certification Model, communications and appeals.

SQA has also engaged with other key partners including Young Scot, Enquire, Who Cares? Scotland and Student Partnership in Quality Scotland (Sparqs) and Scottish Youth Parliament.

In January 2023 the Learner Panel was refreshed with a view to enhancing SQA's learner engagement activity. This refresh introduced a new monthly Learner Advisory Group and comprises learners at different stages of education from school to college and university. The Learner Advisory Group will discuss a variety of topics, including communications and will meet regularly with the SQA Executive Team to present their views. To further build on learner engagement, quarterly in-person sessions will take place. These will be held in a secondary school and move to a different geographical location each time. This approach will ensure wider representation and an opportunity for more learners to have their voice heard. These sessions will focus on key milestones for learners such as, but not limited to, appeals, school transitions and assessment.

The data gathered at these sessions will be used to ensure relevant products and services are designed with the learner at the centre.

### **Learning for Sustainability**

This plan was developed through extensive consultation with children and young people, who are front and centre within it, along with educators across a range of learning settings representing early years through to university level. It provides evidence that the learner voice is strong on LfS, and that young people want it to be part of their everyday learning.

*'We should have Learning for Sustainability because if people learn about it, they will act, and it's true that just a few people can make a change, and more children can have their voices heard.'*

(Member of Children's Parliament as part of consultation research.)

In support of 'Target 2030' and specifically to ensure continued meaningful engagement of the learner voice in this plan, Scottish Government will convene national LfS Children and

Young People Leadership Groups. The groups will be invited to co-design key deliverables in the LfS Action Plan including the new Scottish Government LfS online portal and development of key LfS indicators. SQA will enable links in its learner engagement to this collaboration through its membership of the LfS Leadership Group.

SQA further demonstrates its progressiveness and commitment by embedding LfS into all new and revised qualifications. LfS is a cross-curricular entitlement for all learners, linking together themes of sustainable development education, social justice, climate change, global citizenship, children's rights, equality and outdoor learning.

### **Gaelic language**

SQA attended a meeting, facilitated by Young Scots, between young people and industry partners in their effort to establish a Gaelic and Scots Panel; allowing young people to discuss what is important to them and their language. It gave them an opportunity to feedback on how industry partners could improve their communication and engagement in Gaelic and Scots. Our learning from this event has informed our current Gaelic Language Plan actions.

This includes ensuring our commitment to actively promoting the use of, and raising awareness of, Gaelic within the organisation. We ensure that corporate documents are translated and published along with English versions, to show that Gaelic is given equal respect and not treated as an afterthought. SQA also shares Gaelic language resources with its staff members and encourages the exploration of using Gaelic within our everyday working lives.

SQA is also committed to increasing the number of social media posts that are translated into Gaelic so that our learners can see we are responsive to feedback and calls for increased use of the language.

### **SQA Young Talent Network**

SQA's Young Talent Network gives colleagues aged 16 to 24 a platform where they will be heard, recognised and supported to influence change and ensure SQA fulfils its commitment to developing all of the young workforce.

The Employee Network Group has been set up to drive SQA towards developing a young workforce who will influence change across the business.

The network will allow our young people to become more confident, improve job satisfaction, and increase skills and abilities by taking on internal and external opportunities. Alongside this, we want to give our young people the chance to grow their connections around the organisation.

## Cluster 3: Civil rights and freedoms

This cluster focuses on children's civil rights and freedoms including children's right to move freely in public space and to meet with others; children's right to think and believe what they like, to access information and speak their mind as long it is not harmful to others; children's right to keep personal matters and communications private; and their right to be protected from inhumane or degrading treatment.

### Privacy

UK data protection law (UK General Data Protection Regulations and the Data Protection Act 2018) sets out requirements for the protection of personal data. It requires that any processing of personal data is lawful, fair and transparent, and that appropriate measures are in place to protect that personal data. Through training, policies, process and guidance, SQA employees are made aware that they must comply with these requirements whenever personal data is being processed, including where it is being shared.

All sharing of personal data is considered in relation to proportionality, necessity, and any potential risks to privacy. Only personal data that is required will be shared and that sharing managed through a data-sharing agreement. A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) may also be undertaken where appropriate. SQA has an agreement in place with the Universities and Colleges Admission Service (UCAS) to share candidate results to facilitate the progression of application(s) to study at institutions of further and higher education. The personal data that is shared is, following a matching process, limited to that related to candidates with UCAS applications. SQA is also currently in discussion with the Scottish Government Education Analytical Services to access data from the Pupil Census with consideration being given to the purpose of the data sharing, what data will be required and how it will be used. All of which is being captured in a DPIA.

In relation to rights provided by UK data protection law, SQA maintains the position of children as rights holders. Signposting them to ways in which they can request and therefore access their own personal data either through MySQA or a subject access request (SAR). Candidates can choose to have someone else, such a parent or carer, submit a SAR on their behalf, however they must provide confirmation of this to SQA, and the focus is on providing candidates with access to their information rather than their parents or carers.

### Communication and young people

At our Learner Advisory Group session in February 2023, the learners discussed what good communication looks like from a young person's perspective. This included discussions around communication via schools, the use of social media and making websites accessible. The young people's overall recommendations were:

- ◆ Don't have a rigid plan for communicating — be flexible, try different things and don't be afraid to take risks.
- ◆ One size doesn't fit all, so if you don't get good engagement with one platform or message then change it.
- ◆ Use a variety of platforms and repeat the communications.
- ◆ Everyone likes to get information in different ways, and it needs to be accessible.



An example of this in practice was our campaign, 'Get Exam Ready' that we launched in March of 2022 for session 2022–23. The aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of, and signpost users to, our [learner hub](#) which is packed full of useful resources, hints and tips to help with preparing for exams.

There are links to past papers, the exam timetable, MySQA, and results day support. Every year we also produce the [Your Exams booklet](#) — it contains important information, rules and advice for learners so they can do their best on the day of exams.

The campaign was primarily aimed at learners studying for National Qualifications exams but will also be helpful to parents, carers and practitioners.

Influenced by feedback from young people we used a variety of channels to amplify our message. These include advertising on platforms such as [YouTube](#), Twitch and Spotify, and using social media channels including TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and Facebook.

## **Cluster 4: Violence against children**

This cluster focuses on situations where children experience violence in all its forms including physical and mental violence, abuse and neglect, maltreatment and exploitation including sexual abuse; it highlights the right of children to services which support their physical and psychological recovery; and emphasises that children should not be subjected to torture or to other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment including physical or corporal punishment.

SQA is committed to safeguarding children, young people and protected adults from harm through abuse or neglect.

Abuse and neglect are forms of maltreatment. Somebody may abuse a child or protected adult by inflicting, or by failing to act to prevent, significant harm to the individual. This may include, amongst other things, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect. It can also be the unintended result of a person's actions.

SQA's direct interactions with children and young people are limited. In the main, a young person's school or college would act as an intermediary in SQA's engagement with learners. However, we understand our responsibilities and duties to young people.

In recognition of the important role that SQA can play in safeguarding the welfare of our candidates, we have been working with external stakeholders to establish a policy and associated procedures for child protection.

The procedures will outline the processes to be adopted if:

- ◆ concerns about a candidate's welfare or wellbeing are raised with an SQA colleague and/or one of our appointees
- ◆ a complaint related to a candidate's welfare or wellbeing is raised against an SQA colleague and/or one of our appointees

### **Child Welfare Process**

SQA have child and adult protection officers in place who manage the child and adult welfare process. During the assessment process where an SQA appointee has concerns about a candidate's welfare, the appointees are instructed to raise an 'exception' and contact the dedicated SQA Child and Adult Protection phone number. SQA staff log the candidate details and contact is then made to the candidate's head of centre or child protection co-ordinator within two working days of referral to SQA. The head of centre is then required to confirm via email within five working days that the appropriate action has been taken by the centre in relation to the issue.

To ensure the General Data Protection Regulations are being met, shared information is only used for the purposes of investigating a child and adult protection concern. Access to the shared information is restricted to those who require it for the purposes of investigating a child protection concern, and the shared information must be securely disposed of when it is no longer needed for the purposes of investigating the concern.

Child welfare is in several communications including the Terms and Conditions of Appointment for Invigilators, the Handbook for Invigilators, Guide to Quality Assurance for NQ Appointees, and SQA's website.

## **Domestic Abuse is Everyone's Business — Police Scotland Training**

SQA colleagues attended a workshop held by Police Scotland to highlight domestic abuse in all its forms. We learned how to support colleagues appropriately and where to signpost people for support.

Police Scotland provided information for us to share across SQA. Its message was that domestic abuse is not acceptable, that it is everyone's business, and that it can impact women, men and children.

We have highlighted that domestic abuse is not just physical abuse. It includes verbal, sexual, psychological or financial abuse and is often about power and control. We have promoted the Disclosure Scheme for Domestic Abuse Scotland (DSDAS) where people have the 'right to ask' if they are worried that their partner might have an abusive past, (or they are worried about someone else). The DSDAS could provide information that might help individuals make a positive choice to protect themselves and their future.

## **Cluster 5: Family environment and alternative care**

This cluster focuses on: the primary role of parents and the support parents should have to bring up their children; the right of children to not be separated from parents unless this is in their best interests; the right of children to be well cared for where they live apart from their parents; the right of a child to maintain contact with both parents if that is in their best interests; the right of a child to have a say when decisions are made about where they should live, with placements subject to regular review; and the right of all children to be protected against all forms of violence and abuse.

### **Corporate parenting**

As a corporate parent, SQA has a duty to provide care-experienced children and young people with the kind of support that any good parent would give their own children, to ensure that all aspects of their development are nurtured. We are committed to helping care-experienced young people realise the brighter futures they deserve, in line with Who Cares? Scotland's ambition for a lifetime of equality, love and respect for all care-experienced people in Scotland.

Our [Corporate Parenting Plan 2018–21](#) sets out the action we agreed to take to support care-experienced learners and in 2022–23 we commenced work to review these commitments and report our progress. An extensive online public consultation took place in August to September 2023 to inform our priorities for SQA's updated Corporate Parenting Plan 2023–26. This is due to be published in November 2023 when we will also publish our next Corporate Parenting Report 2019–22.

We have embedded children's rights into our Corporate Parenting Plan 2023–26 and will adopt a rights-based approach to meeting our commitments.

### **Carer Positive**

SQA made a commitment as part of our Equality Outcomes for 2021–25, to become a Carer Positive employer. Following our initial meeting with Carer Positive, we were pleased to learn that we were already well on our way to achieving engaged-level accreditation because of existing practices in the organisation such as our 'Happy to talk flexible working' accreditation, the Employee Assistance Programme and our Parent and Carers Network.

We continued to work towards accreditation during the early part of 2022, including gathering testimonials from carers within the organisation in support of our application. We were pleased to be awarded Carer Positive accreditation in May 2022. It is our intention to progress further as a Carer Positive employer and this will continue to form part of our equality action plan going forward.

## Cluster 6: Basic health and welfare

This cluster focuses on the health and welfare of all children and the consideration of disabled children's rights. All children should have the best possible standard of health, including access to relevant health services. There should be a focus on the determinants of children's health, including mental health.

### Equality of access

SQA's Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications Policy outlines the organisation's commitment to promoting and facilitating access to our qualifications. In practice, this means that every reasonable step is taken to ensure the following:

- ◆ We produce qualifications based on national standards that are as accessible as possible.
- ◆ We review our qualifications to identify any aspects that might adversely impact learners who share characteristics, and we aim to remove any such adverse impacts, wherever possible, and minimise them where it is not possible to remove them altogether.
- ◆ We develop methods of assessment and quality assurance that are sensitive to the needs of all candidates, but which do not compromise our overarching aims of fairness and consistency.
- ◆ We provide assessment arrangements to allow disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs to access the assessment without compromising its integrity. For disabled candidates, we will make reasonable adjustments according to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

### Assessment arrangements

SQA continues to promote and provide the appropriate use of assessment arrangements, including the use of assistive technologies for disabled candidates, to facilitate access to SQA qualifications.

This is a longstanding policy with a positive impact on learners and their ability to access qualifications and assessments.

SQA works in close partnership with centres and disability stakeholder groups to identify and deliver appropriate assessment arrangements for the candidates who need them.

In session 2020–21, where results were based on teacher and lecturer judgement and internal assessment, centres were advised that they must ensure that candidates were provided with the assessment arrangements they would normally have in exams.

Engagement and support for assessment arrangements has included: webinars (on the policy and system, and on the requirements for audit); presentations to the Cross-Party Group on Dyslexia and to Dyslexia Scotland; and engagement with centres and other stakeholders in relation to specific candidates or general issues.

We continue to work with Computer-Assisted Language Learning Scotland (CALL Scotland) to understand developments in the range of available assistive technologies that can be used to support learners, and which may be incorporate into assessment.

CALL's work on the compatibility of Chromebooks and iPads (increasingly used in centres) with SQA's digital question papers informs the technical guidance available for centres and requires ongoing monitoring, especially as the number of candidates requesting digital question papers grows.

We continue to ensure that our information materials are available in a range of formats and in specific settings to meet the needs of individual children and young people.

### **Assessment arrangements data**

Assessment arrangements request data is normally analysed annually. Although there are limitations in the information produced because the system relies on data input by centres (and not directly from the child or young person), and it was not designed for the extraction of statistical data, it is nevertheless useful for identifying trends and drawing inferences.

It allows us to monitor the number of requests being submitted, the most frequently requested assessment arrangements, the reasons for them (in terms of broad categories of difficulty), and the patterns of use of different types of arrangements.

The [number of assessment arrangement requests submitted](#) to us for external assessments can be found on our website. The data shows that there is a steady, incremental increase in the number of requests year on year. This indicates that more children and young people are recognised as having an identified difficulty and appropriate assessment arrangements are being put in place to meet their needs. We do, however, acknowledge that there may be differences in the experience of disabled children and young people and/or those with additional support across Scotland in accessing assessment arrangements. It is for this reason that we are carrying out a research project to understand their experiences and to identify which parts of the process can be improved.

### **Quality assuring centres' assessment arrangements process**

SQA has a responsibility to ensure that the assessment process is rigorous and fair for all learners, and for this reason we must ensure that assessment arrangements are appropriate and only provided to those children and young people who have an identified need. We require that all centres have an effective internal quality assurance system in place for identifying and verifying a disabled child or young person's need for assessment arrangements, and the focus of our quality assurance process is to support centres with this.

Between 2020 and 2021, we developed a professional dialogue alternative to our previous approach of audit visits. This included advice and guidance on the quality assurance requirements for assessment arrangements, and a discussion of the system in place at the centre. It was successfully implemented and well received, and helped to ensure that the devolved responsibility for providing assessment arrangements continues to benefit those candidates who need them. In 2022, the service returned to audit visits carried out by the Liaison Managers Team in its role as auditor. Audit visits will continue in 2023 and will maintain the focus on supporting centres with ensuring evidence gathered to support any requests for assessment arrangements met our quality assurance requirements.

## Cluster 7: Education, leisure and culture

This cluster focuses on the right of all children to an education that will help them achieve their potential without discrimination. Education should be child-centred and empowering and strengthen their capacity to enjoy the full range of children's human rights including their right to express their views and participate in all aspects of their education. Article 29 entitles children to a broad curriculum. Article 31 states that children have a right to play, recreational activities, rest and leisure and to take part in cultural life.

*Education of the child shall be directed to:*

*(a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential*

*(b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations*

*(c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own*

*(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin*

*(e) The development of respect for the natural environment*

### **Development of talents and abilities**

**The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.**

Every child has the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender or disability; if they are in detention; or if they are a refugee. While SQA does not determine the right to education in Scotland, we do have a responsibility to provide assessment and certification of our qualifications for learners.

We endeavour to produce qualifications based on national standards that are as accessible as possible. We equality-review our qualifications to identify any aspects that might adversely impact learners who share particular characteristics, and we aim to remove any such adverse impacts, wherever possible, and minimise them where it is not possible to remove them altogether. We develop methods of assessment and quality assurance that are sensitive to the needs of all candidates, but which do not compromise our overarching aims of fairness and consistency.

## **Flair exhibition**

An example of Article 23 is demonstrated through our recent 'Flair' campaign.

SQA presented 'Flair', an online gallery that showcases some of the most creative work submitted by learners across Scotland for Art and Design, Fashion and Textile Technology, and Photography courses in session 2021–22.

Flair celebrates the diversity and variety of pieces produced by learners across different levels and grades during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the pieces on display were produced by National 4 to Advanced Higher learners.

The pieces were produced by learners from across the country who were working towards National 4 to Advanced Higher courses at the time and span a range of grades, and include paintings, sculptures, architecture, and fashion pieces.

Many of the artworks were inspired by topical issues and those facing young people today, such as climate change, mental health, and the pandemic. Learners were also inspired by the work of other artists and designers that they have studied.

Each piece is accompanied by a statement from the learner, which explains their approach and where they drew inspiration from.

The online gallery is available to view at [www.flair.sqa.org.uk](http://www.flair.sqa.org.uk).

## **Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms**

**The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.**

### **Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC)**

Scotland's GIRFEC provides Scotland with a consistent framework and shared language for promoting, supporting, and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people based on the principle that every child should be safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, and included (SHANARRI5 factors). GIRFEC is central to all government policies which support children, young people and their families and is delivered through services and people who work with families. SQA takes this wider context into account through our work.

### **The Promise**

The Promise is the report by the Independent Care Review which sets out the compelling and profound need to transform the care system for children and young people in Scotland. The review highlights our collective role in a vision where we grow up 'loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential'.

As a corporate parent, SQA has responsibilities towards care-experienced children and to demonstrate that their rights under the UNCRC are being consistently upheld. The Promise states that a child's education should never be compromised by contact with the 'care system'.



## **Respect for parents, carers and language**

**The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or her own.**

Education and training are at the core of Scotland's heritage and culture. They unlock potential, and bring benefits to all of us and to the communities we live in. Our equalities work driven not only by legislative requirements but also by recognition of the diverse needs of the communities across Scotland. We aim to ensure these needs are taken account of and reflected in all our activities.

### **Scots Language Award**

For those who use the language today, the study of Scots — including its history, development and contemporary use — develops their ability to communicate, think critically and use their own language creatively.

The Scots Language Award provides opportunities for learners to study the history and development of the Scots language. It also helps learners develop their ability to understand Scots and communicate in the Scots language. They will also gain a deeper insight into their own history and cultural heritage.

This Award is available at SCQF levels 3, 4, 5 and 6 and appeals to a wide range of learners, including S3 to S6 pupils in secondary schools.

### **British Sign Language National Plan 2017–23**

The National Plan set out ten long-term goals for BSL in Scotland, and 70 actions Scottish Ministers would take by 2020 to make progress towards these goals.

The BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 made it a requirement that all listed authorities prepare and publish BSL plans — SQA is not one of the listed authorities but is specifically mentioned in the National Plan 2017–23 within action 19.

*'Developing Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) awards in BSL.'*

*'Work with the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) to develop an initial suite of awards in BSL, which will form the basis for any future development of BSL qualifications up to Level 6 of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF).'*

SQA now offers a range of BSL qualifications from SCQF level 3 to SCQF level 8. These have been designed for both hearing and deaf learners to develop their language skills. This can benefit hearing learners of BSL, by improving both their language fluency and understanding of the Sign Language Community. The new course being developed by the University of Edinburgh (action 16) will create a group of primary school teachers who can teach in BSL which will be a significant asset to our primary school system.

Under assessment arrangements, pupils can choose to take their exams in BSL, that is receive the questions in BSL and sign their responses to a video camera.

## **Engaging with parents and carers**

Like our learners, parents and carers have information needs, including being kept up to date with changes to qualifications and assessments.

SQA has engaged with parents/carers and their representative organisations for many years, and we will continue to build on this.

We maintain contact with Connect (formerly called the Scottish Parent Teacher Council) and the National Parent Forum of Scotland (NPFS) to hear feedback from our parent and carer audience.

In March 2021 NPFS held a joint webinar with SQA and the Association of Directors of Education Scotland (ADES). The webinar provided information to parents and learners about the Alternative Certification Model (ACM) for 2021 and how it was being applied in schools. Key clips from this webinar were also used on social media channels to increase awareness among parents and carers.

NPFS also has representation at the NQ Steering Group and NQ Comms Group, which means they have been involved in discussions and consulted on all aspects of the Alternative Certification Model in 2020–21 and 2021–22, and the return to exams in 2022–23.

## **SQA Parent and Carers Network**

To support colleagues, we launched our Parents and Carers Network in July 2020. A group was established on MS Teams chat to offer a virtual space for colleagues to connect.

This informal virtual Network, supported by SQA, aims to:

- ◆ provide a safe and confidential space to allow parents and carers to support each other, share ideas, challenges, knowledge and experiences
- ◆ explore how we can raise awareness of the needs of working parents and carers
- ◆ provide a way for others in SQA to consult and engage with our parents and carers

Any employees who are expectant parents or have parenting responsibilities, foster parents, or are caring for a dependent whether they are ill, elderly or disabled family members, friends or partners, or any combination of the above are welcome.

## **Preparation for a responsible life**

**The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.**

The Equality Act 2010 places clear duties on SQA not to discriminate against people who wish to be or who are candidates for SQA's qualifications because of their disability, race, sex, gender re-assignment, religion or belief, age, or sexual orientation (known as 'protected characteristics'). This means that SQA's assessment criteria cannot be discriminatory and that SQA must consider how to make reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates who need them.

As both a regulator and awarding body, SQA is committed to equality of opportunity and to a culture that respects difference. We believe that, as an employer and public body, we can play a leading part in the promotion of equality and diversity more widely. We recognise that equality of access to education is crucial in unlocking significant opportunities in life, and we are aware of our responsibility to uphold both fairness for learners, and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system.

As detailed in this report, there are a number of areas of work that demonstrate this commitment including:

- ◆ LGBT Inclusive Education
- ◆ Equality and Anti-Racism in Education
- ◆ Gaelic Language Plan
- ◆ Corporate Parenting Plan
- ◆ Learning for Sustainability
- ◆ Exceptional Circumstances Service and Appeals 2023
- ◆ Learner Engagement, Aspiration and Strategic Intent
- ◆ Assessment Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments

### **Designing inclusive assessment training course**

SQA staff and appointees are encouraged to complete the SQA Academy course on Designing Inclusive Assessment. This full and detailed course provides guidance, with exemplars, on how to design and write assessment materials to be as accessible and inclusive as possible, including use of language.

A comprehensive review of the course content is underway, to ensure it remains up to date and is fit for purpose. We are also considering how to ensure that SQA Qualifications Development staff and appointees engage with this course and apply the guidance to the development of assessment materials, including question papers for external assessments.

The course has a section on the use of gender-neutral language, and we are updating this in line with a recently completed SQA position paper, which outlines the rationale for promoting the use of gender-neutral language and provides clear guidance on its use. As an inclusive organisation, we want to be sure we are accessible and equitable for all children and young people, including those who belong to the LGBT community. This should also be reflected, as much as possible, in our assessment materials, question papers and published research. The position paper outlines how this can be addressed in various circumstances.

To inform this work we worked with Qualifications Development colleagues in Modern Languages and Gàidhlig to examine how some modern languages which use gendered vocabulary could extend to inclusive gender recognition in various languages of study. As concepts of gender are slowly being recognised across the globe, experts have produced ways to remain neutral within grammatical and cultural contexts. We will keep abreast of how language is evolving to ensure Scottish learners remain current on linguistic developments.

We have also worked with Qualifications Development colleagues in Drama to research best practice for learners in the LGBT community and those who use sign language who wish to

take on an acting role for the Performance component. Qualifications Development colleagues in Drama scheduled a meeting in September with the Royal Conservatoire Scotland to understand their best practice in ensuring that their qualifications are as equitable and inclusive as possible.

Meetings were also scheduled between Qualifications Development colleagues and a centre representative regarding the process used by one sign interpreter to support their Drama cohort using sign guidance created by the centre. Further discussions are to be held between Qualifications Development colleagues and our Policy, Analysis and Standards Equalities Team to identify actions to be taken forward internally, including a suggested review of SQA's quality assurance process for visiting examining components to ensure that this assessment process is objective and free from bias. The potential to produce guidance on non-verbal cues or instructions that learners using sign could follow in further and higher education was also discussed.

## **The development of respect for the natural environment**

SQA welcomes the publication of the refreshed Learning for Sustainability Action Plan 2023–2030 and is committed to continuing to collaborate with partners to ensure that Learning for Sustainability is visible and supported through all new and revised qualifications, where required.

The evidence gathered from young people for this action plan demonstrates that they see Learning for Sustainability as a key element to drive change in the future of the education system and they are asking for bold ambition and the necessary action to make change happen.

Through our work developing the Next Generation of Higher Nationals, we know that learners have an expectation that these qualifications will give them an understanding of sustainability in general, a good grounding in subject-specific sustainability knowledge and skills and the confidence to apply this knowledge and skills to the next stage of their lives.

The subjects we have piloted so far include the opportunity to develop knowledge and understanding of Learning for Sustainability, engaging with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in sector-relevant contexts.

For example, film and TV programme commissioners now require UK production companies to have albert certification before projects are commissioned. The albert organisation encourages the film and TV industry to improve practices off screen to eliminate waste and reduce carbon production, while building awareness on screen by introducing or highlighting sustainability issues.

Knowledge, skills and evidence reflecting on sustainable TV industry and personal practices are embedded in the Next Generation of HN Television qualifications, in line with the albert requirements. Learning materials developed by albert incorporate sustainability into the qualification and also support continuing professional development for lecturers delivering the qualification.

## **Cluster 8: Special protection measures**

This cluster focuses on groups of vulnerable and marginalised children who require special protection. These are often the children who are most at risk of having their rights ignored or infringed. They include asylum-seeking and refugee children, child victims of trafficking or exploitation, and children in trouble with the law.

The anti-racist education plan and SQA's participation and commitment to the AREP include vulnerable children from asylum-seeking and refugee groups. Language and culture are integral parts of the programme's vision as to ensure that a variety of perspectives are taken in conjunction with learning content. For example, in 2022 the Ukrainian badura was adopted as an accepted instrument within the SQA Music performance qualification. This came about due to a query by refugee pupils.

## 2023 and beyond

As we reflect on the progress we have made in embedding children's rights to date, we also see areas where we can make further improvements and advancements.

We will continue to pursue partnership opportunities that allow the voice of children and young people to be heard and at the centre of education.

We will invest in developing our leaders and employees to the highest standard, so they understand the vital role everyone plays in embedding children's rights.

We will develop governance processes around children rights and wellbeing impact assessments.

We will make evidence-based and informed decisions taking into account the impacts on children and young people, including engaging with children and young people through research and communications about our products and services.

We will monitor our assessment arrangements to assist disabled learners and/or those with additional support needs who may need support when accessing an exam.

We will incorporate children's rights into our Corporate Parenting Plan and commitments.

We will continue to deliver on the Scottish Government's Learning for Sustainability Action Plan.

We will continue to create positive changes and make valuable contributions that support our local communities, environment, customers, and employees as a responsible business.

We will do everything we can to source and recruit, develop, and retain young talent.

We will review our safeguarding policy to ensure the welfare of our candidates.

We will continue monitoring the progress of the UNCRC (Incorporation) Scotland Bill as it makes its way through parliament and ensure that we continue working towards the goal of making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up.

We will develop a Children's Rights Framework for the new qualifications body.

We will continue to deliver for learners, schools, colleges and other stakeholders to ensure a smooth transition to the new qualifications body.