SQA Equality Outcomes 2025–29

Publication date: April 2025

Equality Outcome 1: Diverse Workforce

We have increased diversity throughout our workforce, particularly in relation to underrepresented groups such as disabled and minority ethnic employees to better reflect the communities we serve and to enhance our inclusive culture.

Why we chose this Equality Outcome

We want to ensure that our organisation reflects the diversity of the communities we serve. There is evidence from our workforce data to suggest this is not the case, particularly for Race and Disability. This outcome also reflects the wider landscape.

Protected characteristics

Relevant to all protected characteristics but with a focus on Race and Disability.

SQA considers being care experienced as a protected characteristic.

We will achieve this outcome by

♦ Developing our People Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in collaboration with diverse groups.
♦ Further reviewing our recruitment and selection processes. Address identified barriers in collaboration with our employee networks, in line with the Scottish Government Ethnic Minority Recruitment Toolkit and other relevant legislation and research.
♦ Continuing to monitor workforce equality data across all protected characteristics to determine whether further action is required.
♦ Maintaining our Disability Confident Leader Accreditation.
♦ Gaining Carer Positive 'Established' accreditation.
♦ Implementing a Race Equality Action plan that includes our Business in the Community Commitments.
♦ Continuing to monitor and take action to address any gender, minority ethnic, sexual orientation or disability pay gaps.
♦ Continuing to deliver our mandatory Inclusive Recruitment training.
♦ Developing an annual equality, diversity and inclusion staff survey.
♦ We will continue to work towards the principles in the Fair Work Framework, so our staff have an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect in the workplace.

We will we measure our success by

♦ Increasing applications from underrepresented groups
♦ Increasing the number of diverse external partnerships

Equality Outcome 2: Knowledge and Understanding

Leaders and employees at every level of our organisation, have increased knowledge and understanding so that they can promote equality, diversity and inclusion and challenge discrimination through their decisions, actions and behaviours.

Why we chose this Equality Outcome

We want to ensure that leaders and employees at every level of our organisation have a base knowledge of equality, diversity, and inclusion so that they are empowered to challenge discrimination and promote equality through their decisions, actions and behaviours.

Protected characteristics

Relevant to all protected characteristics.

SQA considers being care experienced as a protected characteristic.

We will achieve this outcome by

♦ Developing a training matrix for equality, diversity and inclusion for all staff at all levels of our organisation that will include a range of equality, diversity and inclusion training opportunities, including training for senior leaders and relevant staff to tackle unconscious bias in decision making and further training to better support neurodiverse staff.
♦ Further developing monitoring and reporting mechanisms for core mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Inclusive Recruitment and Dignity at Work training and other relevant training.
♦ Further promoting relevant equality, diversity and inclusion training, and utilising training opportunities provided by Brodies, Employers Network for Equality and Inclusion, and others.
♦ Reviewing leadership induction processes to enhance knowledge and skills in equality, diversity and inclusion.
♦ Reviewing Induction processes for all staff to enhance knowledge and skills in equality, diversity and inclusion.
♦ Reviewing our annual performance and appraisal processes (My Review).
♦ Reviewing our Learning and Development policy.
♦ Developing an annual equality, diversity and inclusion survey.

We will we measure our success by

♦ 100% mandatory training completion rates for all staff at every level, including new staff within three months of joining our organisation.
♦ Monitoring staff engagement with educational articles and workshops.
♦ Increased satisfaction rates in the annual equality, diversity and inclusion survey.
♦ Monitoring staff grievance, disciplinary and leavers data.
♦ Further evaluation of progress by completion of the Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation from Employers Network of Equality and Inclusion (ENEI) annually.

Equality Outcome 3 – Qualifications and Assessment

We will have improved qualification development and design processes, which are inclusive, anti-racist and accessible while balancing the principles of assessment. This will ensure that SQA qualifications are as equitable as possible for all learners including those with protected characteristics.

Why we chose this Equality Outcome

- There is an ongoing need to help assessment and qualification developers to understand the barriers to assessment that different groups of learners face, including the needs of the increasing number of identified neurodivergent learners and those who experience disrupted learning.
- Findings from research into assessment arrangements 2024.
- Evidence gathered towards the previous equality outcome in this area.
- The ongoing rise in the number of assessment arrangements.
- The number of complex requests for reasonable adjustments.
- Feedback from members, including youth ambassadors, of the Scottish Government Anti-Racist Education Programme (AREP).
- TIDE (Talent Inclusion and Diversity Evaluation) evaluation and internal survey of Qualifications Development (QD) staff shows that training and development are priority areas for improvement and opportunity.
- Recent advancements in artificial intelligence and emergent technologies and their impact on assessments and qualifications.

Protected characteristics

Relevant to all protected characteristics.

SQA considers being care experienced as a protected characteristic.

We will achieve this outcome by

Inclusive design

- Ensuring that assessment materials reflect diverse cultures, perspectives, and experiences.
- Ensuring that language used in assessments is clear, unbiased, and free from stereotypes.
- Researching methodologies for identifying potential bias in written assessments.
- Ensuring that the future design of the reformed qualifications and assessments meet the principles of assessment and includes equity of access for all learners in line with relevant legislation.

Anti-racist practice

- Implementing training for Qualifications Development staff on anti-racist principles and practices.
- Regularly reviewing assessment content to address and resolve any racial biases or discriminatory elements.

- Incorporating anti-racist curriculum principles as designed by key stakeholders in AREP into assessment materials.
- Engaging in collaborative AREP curriculum working group to ensure assessment materials are user-led and aligned with modern practice.

Accessibility

- Continuing to ensure that assessments are accessible to disabled learners and those with additional support needs (including neurodivergent learners, recognising they may not identify as disabled) by providing reasonable adjustments to allow these learners to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding in SQA qualifications.
- Reviewing SQA's suite of assessment arrangements, which will include reflecting best practice, considering trends, uptake and practicability and engaging with learners and specialist teachers.
- Ensuring that any extension of approaches to assessment in National Courses, including the use of digital assessment, does not present any barriers for learners.
- Ensuring that guidance and information provided to centres and learners regarding the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) and information communications technologies (ICT) in external assessments reflect our progressively digital society. Our practice should ensure that learners are not disadvantaged and should reflect their usual way of working in learning and teaching settings.

Stakeholder engagement

- Involving diverse groups of people with lived experience (learners, practitioners, stakeholders) and their representatives — and acting on their feedback — in qualification development practices.
- Collaborating with equality and diversity experts to improve assessment processes.
- Continuing to monitor feedback and enquiries from learners, practitioners, equality and inclusion key partners to identify trends and potential improvements to our guidance and information to centres who deliver SQA qualifications.
- Collaborate with our partners in education to improve outcomes for children and young people and care experienced people, who are impacted by poverty. We will do this in line with our role in the education sector.

We will we measure our success by

- Monitoring staff's uptake of development opportunities.
- Monitoring the type and volume of assessment arrangements and use of ICT in external exams, and trends within these.
- Considering the outputs from the project to examine future quality assurance approaches to assessment arrangements.
- Considering the outputs from our Equality Review of Qualifications process.
- Ensuring that evidence that equalities data and information gathered from impact assessments is used in decision making processes, to ensure decisions are informed and evidenced based.
- Considering evidence of involvement of learners from under-represented groups.
- Involvement in wider education reform, including the Curriculum Improvement Cycle.

Equality Outcome 4 – Inclusive Communications

Inclusive communication ensures that all learners, educators and stakeholders, regardless of their background or abilities, have equitable access to information and can participate fully in dialogue with the organisation.

Why we chose this Equality Outcome

Qualifications Scotland is committed to everyone we serve, which is at the heart of every service we deliver and every product we provide. Inclusive communication is essential to achieving this commitment and demonstrating how the organisation supports the wider positive transformation of education and skills.

Protected characteristics

Relevant to all protected characteristics.

SQA considers being care experienced as a protected characteristic.

We will achieve this outcome by

- Effectively and meaningfully involving learners, educators and stakeholders in decision making.
- Everyone in our organisation using plain and inclusive language.
- Engaging with a wide variety of audiences and stakeholders to develop communications.
- Providing all communications in clear and accessible formats across a variety of channels.
- Exploring new channels and approaches to supporting our customers.
- Ensuring transparency in Qualifications Scotland's decision-making by clearly communicating the evidence used and actively seeking feedback to improve our processes.

We will we measure our success by

- Independent audit and monitoring activity with stakeholders to ensure communications and engagement activities are meeting their needs.
- Collecting and analysing data to measure the impact of our inclusive communication.
- Full compliance with WCGAG 2.2 regulations, ensuring all processes meet accessibility standards and promote inclusivity.

Equality Outcome 5 – Accreditation

Approved awarding bodies and their providers understand their role in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion so that learners with lived experience of inequality can access qualifications and assessment.

Why we chose this Equality Outcome

Stakeholder analysis highlighted that the supplementary guidance for ['SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles'](#) should be reviewed to provide further detail around implementation. This review allows us to advance equality of opportunity for different protected characteristics by strengthening equality throughout the principles, to which the approved awarding body will be audited against.

Protected characteristics

Relevant to all protected characteristics.

SQA considers being care experienced as a protected characteristic.

We will achieve this outcome by

♦ Mandatory equality and diversity training for all Accreditation staff.
♦ Conducting a review of the supplementary information to ensure that, where appropriate, it recognises the need to advance opportunity for learners.
♦ Publishing revised supplementary information along with a launch session for approved awarding bodies.
♦ Monitoring the number and type of complaints received that relate to equality.
♦ Reviewing relevant policy and guidance documentation.
♦ Promoting Equality Diversity and Inclusion at our Standard Setting Organisation Forum and Awarding Bodies Forum.

We will we measure our success by

♦ Monitoring activity through our audits and review the actions undertaken by approved awarding bodies and their providers in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion.
♦ Providing annual updates through our Corporate Plan to the Accreditation Committee and Scottish Ministers.