SQA's Equality Outcomes 2017–21

Introduction

The purpose of the public sector equality duty is to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into the day-to-day business of public authorities. It sets a clear expectation that public services must treat everyone with dignity and respect. Compliance with the duty is not only a legal obligation, but it also makes very good business sense. An organisation that is able to provide services to meet the diverse needs of its users will carry out its core business more efficiently, and a workforce that has a supportive working environment is more productive.

As 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 promoting equality and diversity more widely.

SQA is committed to equality and diversity and supports the Scottish Government's national outcome of Tackling Inequality.

SQA's revised equality outcomes set the framework for the work we will undertake to improve outcomes for the communities we serve and the people who work for us. These outcomes are driven by consideration of the diverse needs of our communities — SQA learners, customers, employees and appointees. We aim to ensure that we take account of these needs and that they are reflected in everything we do.

During 2016–17 SQA's equality sub groups carried out work to:

♦ identify the actions from SQA's Equality Strategy 2013–17 that are completed, have been mainstreamed, become 'business as usual' activity, or are part of work that is ongoing
♦ review a range of internal and external evidence sources
♦ review published statistical evidence and research
♦ consider feedback from a number of groups about their experiences through SQA's consultation and involvement activity
♦ review SQA's employee equality monitoring data reports
♦ consider feedback from SQA staff gathered as part of our internal staff surveys
♦ review feedback gathered from SQA's stakeholder tracking and customer surveys
♦ identify the key issues for SQA in relation to equality, to refresh SQA's equality outcomes, actions and measures

The reduction in the number of equality outcomes for 2017–21 is due to the progress we have made to mainstream equality considerations as part of our day to day business activity.

SQA will continue to gather feedback, both internally and externally, on a regular basis from a number of different groups. We also aim to seek views as our outcomes and contributory actions are developed into more detailed work plans. We will continue to measure our progress over the next two years to achieve these commitments.

SQA's equality outcomes 2017–21

SQA's equality outcomes are statements of the results we aim to achieve in promoting equality, challenging discrimination and fostering good relations across each of the protected characteristics for:

♦ age
♦ disability
♦ sex (male or female)
♦ sexual orientation
♦ gender re-assignment
♦ marriage and civil partnership
♦ pregnancy and maternity
♦ race
♦ religion or belief

These equality outcomes will guide our efforts over the next four years to integrate equality further into our planning and decision-making.

Equality outcome 1: SQA as an employer

SQA has an increasingly diverse workforce that fully embraces equality, diversity and respect for all resulting in benefits to all staff and the wider society.

Equality outcome 2: SQA Awarding Body

Advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination for all candidates by ensuring SQA's qualifications are as fair and as accessible as possible.

Equality outcome 3: SQA Accreditation

Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation.

How we will achieve our equality outcomes

Equality outcome 1: SQA as an employer

Equality outcome 1	
SQA has an increasingly diverse workforce that fully embraces equality, diversity and respect for all resulting in benefits to all staff and the wider society.	
Evidence	♦ SQA employee equality monitoring data reports 2015–17 ♦ SQA equal pay audit reports 2015–17 ♦ Internal initiatives to increase the level of employee equality information held by SQA ♦ Results from SQA's Dignity and Respect staff survey 2016 ♦ Staff feedback from SQA's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Event 2016 ♦ Feedback from SQA's staff networks ♦ Consultation with SQA's trade unions and Joint Negotiating Consultative Committee (JNCC) ♦ Feedback from SQA's 2014 and 2017 staff survey ♦ Feedback from Stonewall staff survey 2015 ♦ Consideration of local/national demographics ♦ Close the Gap Guidance for reporting on gender and employment, equal pay, and occupational segregation ♦ Equality and Human Rights Commission Report on pregnancy and maternity discrimination 2015 ♦ Race Equality Framework 2016–30 ♦ Scottish Government National Performance Framework ♦ Fair Work Convention and Framework
SQA's strategic goals	Goal 4: Ensure our culture and values support the engagement and wellbeing of our staff and foster their commitment to the success of SQA. Goal 6: Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the education, skills and training landscape.
Contributory actions	We will: ♦ Improve SQA's employee monitoring and reporting across all protected characteristics, in particular in relation to disability, ethnicity and pregnancy and maternity ♦ Campaign to raise staff awareness about SQA's data collection, monitoring and reporting responsibilities to increase the number of existing staff who provide their equality monitoring data (protected characteristics data) and enable more accurate reporting. We aim to reduce the number of 'nil returns' and 'do not wish to specify' responses from staff ♦ Analyse SQA's employment monitoring data to provide detailed reports on an annual basis and identify further actions required ♦ Report, review and analyse employment monitoring data gathered to inform policy and equality impact assessments

	♦ Promote and support dignity and respect as part our work to encourage a culture of mutual respect ♦ Provide evidence annually to renew SQA's accreditation to the Department of Work and Pensions Disability Confident Scheme ♦ Participate in Stonewall Scotland's Workplace Equality Index ♦ Actively incorporate the Fair Working Framework into all policies and management practices ♦ Review HR policies and procedures on a scheduled basis, to ensure they incorporate best practice in terms of policy, language used and ability to promote and develop equality in SQA ♦ Engage with trade unions and staff representatives to deliver effective HR policies and procedures ♦ Survey SQA's staff to understand better their experience of the SQA culture ♦ Develop action plans arising from our staff surveys, follow through on actions, and publicise the actions that have been taken. 'You said, we did' approach ♦ Develop staff awareness and confidence in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion. By ensuring staff members receive effective induction and in-post refresher training and development that means they are confident in their knowledge of equality and diversity and how seriously SQA takes such matters ♦ Analyse and review training requirements SQA employees, appointees and SQA's Board and committee members, and deliver appropriate training ♦ Analyse data for SQA's Equal Pay Audit and produce required action plans ♦ Analyse intelligence from exit interviews and disputes involving dignity at work to monitor equality in practice.
Measures	♦ Improvements made to SQA's employee monitoring data collection, analysis, reporting and action plans developed based on employee equality monitoring data ♦ Increase the staff response to SQA's employment monitoring data — achieve 75% by December 2018. Ensure existing data gaps are filled ♦ Action plans developed linked to SQA surveys results and well publicised when actions are taken ♦ Survey participation rates remain at same level or improve ♦ Staff recognise SQA as an equal opportunities employer ♦ Staff survey action plans deliver change staff identify as linked to their survey feedback ♦ Maintaining Disability Confident accreditation and Stonewall Diversity Champion status ♦ Positive feedback from the Stonewall Scotland staff feedback questionnaire ♦ Positive staff feedback received relating to SQA policies via SQA staff surveys

	♦ Effective trade union and staff representatives' engagement in HR policy development ♦ Staff training feedback indicates training at induction and afterwards, during employment, is effective and meets employee and employer's needs ♦ Annual equal pay audits carried out, any potential causes of unequal pay identified and actions plans developed to monitor progress
Protected characteristics	♦ Age ♦ Disability ♦ Sex (male or female) ♦ Sexual orientation ♦ Gender re-assignment ♦ Marriage and civil partnership ♦ Pregnancy and maternity ♦ Race ♦ Religion or belief
Public sector equality duty	♦ Advance equality of opportunity ♦ Challenge discrimination ♦ Foster good relations

Equality outcome 2: SQA Awarding Body

Equality outcome 2
Advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination for all candidates by ensuring SQA's qualifications are as fair and as accessible as possible.

Evidence	Equality outcome 2 is based on evidence of equality issues for candidates with protected characteristics. Internal and external evidence sources have been used, including both quantitative and qualitative evidence from a range of formal and anecdotal sources to inform the equality outcome. This has included:
	♦ Consideration of the Research and Evidence Report of the thematic review on equality and inclusion in qualification design, assessment and quality assurance which includes relevant internal and external research, commissioned by SQA and others and by engagement and consultation with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders (see Appendix 1)
	♦ Discussions with (RPSS Equality Team, Assessment Arrangements Team, SQA's Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group, SQA's Equality and Diversity Steering Group and Qualifications Directorate Sub-group and SQA's Qualifications Development staff, Operations staff, quality enhancement managers and customer liaison managers
	♦ Ongoing discussions regarding the implementation of equality impact assessments
	♦ A review of external equality evidence:
	   — Scottish Government Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016–2030
	   — Scottish Government Child Poverty Strategy 2014–2017
	   — The Commission on Widening Access Final Report 2016
	   — National Improvement framework for Scottish education
	♦ Detailed examination of equality issues raised in correspondence from schools/colleges, equality groups, candidates and/or parents (2014–17)
	♦ Detailed scrutiny of cases of exceptional requests for assessment arrangements (2014–17)
	♦ Careful consideration of statistical data from SQA's Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system (2017), including data on use of ICT and assistive technologies
	♦ Careful consideration of statistical data on the uptake of bilingual dictionaries for candidates with English as an additional language
	♦ CALL Scotland (2015) Dragon Naturally Speaking in SQA Examinations and Assessments (report to SQA)
	♦ Equality Challenge Unit (2015) Assessment Issues in Relation to Candidates Experiencing Mental Health Difficulties (report to SQA)
	♦ CALL Scotland (2016) Report on Speech Recognition in SQA's External Assessments (report for SQA)

SQA's strategic goals	Equality outcome 2 will support SQA's work in relation to the implementation of our Governing Principles, in particular, the requirement for SQA to ensure: ♦ all qualifications are fit for purpose (Governing Principle 4) ♦ all assessments used in its qualifications are valid and reliable (Governing Principle 6) ♦ all qualifications and assessments are as fair and accessible as possible (Governing Principle 7) This is linked to SQA's Strategic Goals 1, 5 and 6 below: ♦ Goal 1: Develop, deliver and maintain a portfolio of qualifications and services to support the needs and aspirations of Scotland, its people and its economy ♦ Goal 5: Deliver high-quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive services to our customers ♦ Goal 6: Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the skills, training and education landscape
Contributory actions	We will: ♦ Refresh our Equality Review Process ensuring it is fit for purpose in the revision of National Qualifications ♦ Ensure National Qualifications that are being revised are effectively equality-reviewed in line with the refreshed process and guidance by sampling course specifications and course assessment specifications ♦ Ensure all staff involved in the production of assessment materials receive appropriate training and have access to effective guidance on designing inclusive assessments ♦ Ensure that all assessment questions, items or tasks, and the supporting marking instructions: — pose no unnecessary barriers to candidates in relation to any of the protected characteristics — reflect the full diversity of Scottish society and — are free from narrow, negative or stereotypical representations of different groups by sampling external examination question papers ♦ Explore the assessment issues for candidates using new and emerging assistive technologies to ensure that candidates are not unduly disadvantaged, for example: — by investigating the implications for SQA's digital question papers of the use of Chromebooks now being introduced in local authorities — by producing practical advice and guidance for schools advice for schools — by holding a national seminar on the use of speech recognition technologies in SQA examinations and assessments

	♦ Ensure that materials intended to support the delivery of qualifications, such as guidance, exemplar assessments, case studies and publicity material: — pose no unnecessary barriers to candidates in relation to any of the protected characteristics — reflect the full diversity of Scottish society and — are free from narrow, negative or stereotypical representations of different groups by sampling these materials ♦ Ensure that technologies, other than assistive technologies, introduced to support the assessment and quality assurance of SQA's qualifications do not unduly disadvantage candidates and do not restrict the use of appropriate assessment arrangements
Measures	♦ Refreshed equality review process, guidance and training ♦ SQA's Equality Review of Qualifications process progressed for the revision of National Qualifications and new and revised units in group awards ♦ Feedback received from equality group stakeholders on accessibility of SQA's qualifications ♦ Current provision of assessment arrangements determined to have positive impact and deemed to be effective in providing access to SQA assessments ♦ Reduction in number and types of equality issues raised in relation to access to SQA's qualifications ♦ Reduction in the number of requests for exceptional assessment arrangements/reasonable adjustments for individual candidates as a measure of the accessibility of the assessment standard
Protected characteristics	♦ Age ♦ Disability ♦ Sex (male or female) ♦ Sexual orientation ♦ Gender re-assignment ♦ Marriage and civil partnership ♦ Pregnancy and maternity ♦ Race ♦ Religion or belief
Public sector equality duty	♦ Advance equality of opportunity ♦ Challenge discrimination ♦ Foster good relations

Equality outcome 3: SQA Accreditation

Equality outcome 3	
Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation.	
Evidence	The European Commission recommended in 2012 that member states must have in place a process for the recognition of non-formal and informal achievement by 2018. The SCQF Partnership has led work in Scotland on developing a toolkit to assist with the recognition of prior learning/achievement which, if implemented, will assist Scotland in meeting this recommendation (the other three nations have differing approaches. In addition, the Scottish Government is considering how it can support migrant workers in having their qualifications recognised in Scotland. There is evidence that migrant workers are being required to undertake Scottish qualifications when they already hold a similar qualification from their home country.
SQA's strategic goals	Goal 8: Independently accredit, quality assure and regulate approved awarding bodies and qualifications thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government.
Contributory actions	We will: ♦ Work with approved awarding bodies to ensure that their policies and practices give due regard to equality of opportunity in relation to the protected characteristics and, where appropriate take necessary regulatory action to address any discrimination. ♦ Monitor and review the implementation of Reasonable Adjustment and Special Considerations Policies by awarding bodies ♦ Monitor and review the implementation of Reasonable Adjustment and Special Consideration Policies by providers ♦ Monitor and review the implementation of policies with regards to the Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of Prior Achievement by awarding bodies ♦ Monitor and review the implementation of policies with regards to the Recognition of Prior Learning and Recognition of Prior Achievement by providers
Measures	♦ Improvements to relevant awarding body policies, and processes ♦ Evidence of implementation ♦ Data gathered on reasonable adjustments/special considerations and Recognition of prior learning/achievement ♦ Evidence of the implementation of awarding body policies and their approved providers
Protected characteristics	♦ Age ♦ Disability

	♦ Sex (male or female) ♦ Sexual orientation ♦ Gender re-assignment ♦ Marriage and civil partnership ♦ Pregnancy and maternity ♦ Race ♦ Religion or belief
Public sector equality duty	♦ Advance equality of opportunity ♦ Challenge discrimination ♦ Foster good relations

For further information on SQA's work on equalities, please go to www.sqa.org.uk/equality.

Contact us

Your feedback is important to us. If you have any questions, require more information or an alternative format, please contact us or write to:

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