



SQA Equality Strategy 2013–17



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Foreword

The Equality Act 2010 gives employers and businesses greater clarity about their responsibilities. It sets a clear expectation that public services must treat everyone with dignity and respect.

SQA and its predecessor bodies share a long history of commitment to fairness for all, including learners, and of considering carefully how best to ensure that it is made a reality. 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 promoting equality and diversity more widely. We recognise that equality of access to education is crucial in unlocking many significant opportunities in life, and we are acutely aware of our responsibility to uphold both fairness for learners and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system.

We recognise that not everyone's needs or experiences are the same, and that equality does not mean always treating everybody in exactly the same way. We are committed to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's vision of a modern Britain where everyone is treated with dignity and respect, and all have an equal chance to succeed.

The public sector equality duty, created by the Equality Act 2010, replaces the race, disability and gender equality duties. It is supported by the specific duties contained in the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2012.

SQA's Equality Strategy 2013-17 explains our commitment and actions to meet, and go beyond, our statutory obligations. It articulates the equality outcomes that all Scottish public bodies were challenged to develop by the specific duties published in May 2012. It explains how we developed these, and how we will monitor our progress towards them. We aim to ensure that our equality strategy is driven by consideration of the diverse needs of the communities served by SQA, and we intend to take these forward in partnership. I look forward to working with you to ensure they become reality.

Janet Brown
Chief Executive

Context

What SQA does

SQA is Scotland's national body for qualifications (other than degrees). Our main functions are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996. We are a non-departmental public body, and are sponsored by the Scottish Government's Learning Directorate.

SQA's core purpose is to set and maintain standards in education and training through the qualifications and assessment that are delivered in schools, in colleges, and in workplace learning. Our accreditation function sets and maintains standards for awarding bodies and the accredited qualifications in Scotland, such as Scottish Vocational Qualifications.

SQA's strategic goals and values

SQA's [Corporate Plan 2013–16](#) sets our strategic direction for the next three years, covering both SQA's accreditation and awarding functions. The plan has built on previous years' plans, ensuring that the organisation's strategic goals support the Scottish Government's National Outcomes. It explains that SQA's strategic goals for 2013–16 are:

- 1 Develop, deliver and maintain a portfolio of qualifications and services to support the needs and aspirations of Scotland, its people and its economy.
- 2 Provide leadership and expertise in a range of areas including assessment, qualification development and quality enhancement.
- 3 Support the Scottish Government's agenda to maximise the benefits of international engagement.
- 4 Accredite and assure the quality of qualifications delivered in Scotland, subject to demand and statutory requirement — other than those conferred by higher education institutions.
- 5 Ensure high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive delivery of services to our customers.
- 6 Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the education, skills and training landscape
- 7 Continue to develop a business model that enables SQA to achieve self-financed status.

SQA's commitment to fairness and equality is enshrined in its values, which set out the way that SQA's staff members are expected to work together and with others. We call these values:

- ◆ Trusted
- ◆ Enabling
- ◆ Progressive

SQA's commitment to fairness

SQA has made good progress towards integrating equality in the development of its policies and activities. Our [Equality Mainstreaming Report 2012-13](#) provides further information and details our progress during the period.

What we want to achieve in equality

SQA's Equality Strategy 2013-17 explains our commitment and actions to meet, and go beyond, our statutory obligations. It presents SQA's equality outcomes and explains how we developed these, and how we will monitor our progress towards them.

SQA's Equality Outcomes 2013–17

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

- ◆ Age
- ◆ Disability
- ◆ Sex (male or female)
- ◆ Sexual orientation
- ◆ Gender reassignment
- ◆ Marriage and civil partnership
- ◆ Pregnancy and maternity
- ◆ Race
- ◆ Religion or belief

Equality Outcome 1

SQA understands and takes appropriate action to address any discrimination, potential to promote equality, or opportunity to foster good relations in its policies and practices for recruitment, development, promotion, dispute resolution and exit of its employees, in relation to the protected characteristics.

Equality Outcome 2

SQA understands and takes appropriate action to address any discrimination, potential to promote equality, or opportunity to foster good relations in its policies and practices for appointment, training, and performance management of its appointees in relation to the protected characteristics.

Equality Outcome 3

SQA's strategic suppliers are inclusive and diverse organisations.

Equality Outcome 4

Eliminate unlawful treatment, and advance equality of opportunity for particular groups, by improving access to qualifications and attainment through reducing or removing barriers within qualifications and assessments in relation to the relevant protected characteristics. Foster good relations between candidates who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it by ensuring that people represented in assessment materials reflect the full diversity of Scottish society.

Equality Outcome 5

Eliminate unlawful treatment and advance equality of opportunity for disabled candidates through promoting and implementing effective procedures and processes for the provision of reasonable adjustments in SQA assessments.

Equality Outcome 6

Advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between male and female learners, by encouraging non-traditional subject choices for SQA qualifications offered in schools, colleges and in vocational training. In the longer term, working with our partners, we aim to increase the representation of female and male learners in non-traditional courses.

Equality Outcome 7

Access to, and experience of, customer-facing activities and services will advance equality of opportunity.

Equality Outcome 8

Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation by working with the approved awarding bodies to ensure that the policies and practices of the approved awarding bodies give due regard to equality of opportunity in relation to the protected characteristics and, where appropriate take appropriate regulatory action to address any discrimination.

How we will achieve our outcomes

Equality Outcome 1	SQA understands and takes appropriate action to address any discrimination, potential to promote equality or opportunity to foster good relations in its policies and practices for recruitment, development, promotion, dispute resolution and exit of its employees, in relation to the protected characteristics
Evidence	<p>We identified the need to obtain measurable evidence to achieve Outcome 1. This is demonstrated in the proposed actions to identify any areas where disadvantage may exist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Internal initiatives to increase the level of employee equality information held by SQA. ◆ Identification of any areas of potential disadvantage as reported in SQA's 2012 staff survey ◆ Feedback from Stonewall staff survey 2012 ◆ Consideration of local /national demographics ◆ Positive feedback from SQA's staff equality questionnaire issued in December 2012.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Promotion of SQA's equality work, eg with Stonewall and Two Ticks, to develop an awareness of protected characteristic terms and values within the organisation ◆ A review of the language used in our HR policies to adopt good practice. ◆ Understand the effects of our policies and practices — agree a timetable for equality impact assessment of decision reference points associated with HR policies. ◆ Continue to discuss HR policies with SQA's recognised Union representatives. ◆ Increase staff awareness of the SQA Partnership Group's contribution to equality. ◆ Administer SQA's biennial staff survey externally to maximise staff response rate and reporting of issues due to the confidentiality of the process. ◆ Continue to increase the volume of employee equality information gathered. ◆ Report, review and analyse data gathered — use employee equality information to develop policy and inform equality impact assessments ◆ Ensure staff members receive appropriate development and training, and are confident in their knowledge of what 'equality and diversity' means for their role ◆ Consider training requirements for SQA's Board and committee members (online training/awareness raising). ◆ Continue to conduct SQA's equal pay audit.
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide opportunities to increase the level of equality data held for employees by December 2013. ◆ 50% of HR policies reviewed by April 2015. ◆ Equality Impact Assessments completed by April 2015. ◆ Information from the 2012 staff survey and an action plan to address any identified areas of disadvantage collated by April 2013. ◆ Equality awareness training delivered to staff (completion of online training / evaluation of feedback).

Equality Outcome 2	SQA understands and takes appropriate action to address any discrimination, potential to promote equality or opportunity to foster good relations in its policies and practices for appointment, training, and performance management of its appointees in relation to the protected characteristics.
Evidence	<p>We identified the need to obtain measurable evidence to achieve Outcome 2. This is demonstrated in the proposed actions to identify any areas where disadvantage may exist:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Evaluation of the distribution of ages and gender across all appointees (by June 2013) ◆ Monitoring/evaluating feedback received from appointees and those interested in becoming an appointee ◆ Positive feedback from SQA's appointee equality questionnaire issued in November 2012.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Consider developing an online application process which will provide the opportunity to gather and evaluate appointee equality data. ◆ Continue to review and consider the equality impact assessment requirements of relevant policies and procedures. ◆ Continue to engage with appointees to promote equality. ◆ Develop and deliver appropriate appointee training. ◆ Consider promotion of appointee policies and procedures.
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Completion of equality impact assessments of relevant policies and procedures in line with milestones ◆ Equality training delivered to Appointees (completion of online training / evaluation of feedback) ◆ Evidence of disadvantage not yet proven therefore unable to confirm measurement at outcome level at this stage.

Equality Outcome 3	
SQA's strategic suppliers are inclusive and diverse organisations.	
Evidence	SQA understands and takes appropriate action to ensure that we engage with suppliers who do not discriminate in relation to any of the protected characteristics, and that they have equality policies and/or statements detailing their commitment to their staff and supply chain. However, our ability to challenge their evidential proof is limited.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Continue to require suppliers to complete probity statements and include equality policies or statements when submitting tenders ◆ Introduce discussion of equality as part of regular contract management and cover details of equality workforce monitoring (where possible), recruitment, training, and tribunals raised (both settled and rejected) ◆ Explore the potential to allocate a proportion of relevant expenditure to source supplies from supported businesses.
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Equality statements/policies to be scored as part of the contract evaluation. ◆ KPI's to be identified and measured at contract review meeting. ◆ Procurement Policy to include one contract to be awarded to a supported business.
Equality Outcome 4	
Eliminate unlawful treatment and advance equality of opportunity for particular groups by improving access to qualifications and attainment through reducing or removing barriers within qualifications and assessments in relation to the relevant protected characteristics. Foster good relations between candidates who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it by ensuring that people represented in assessment materials reflect the full diversity of Scottish society.	
Evidence	<p>SQA qualification specifications and assessments (including competence standards) may contain potential barriers for candidates, on grounds of the protected characteristics, that have an adverse impact on their performance.</p> <p>Feedback from equality groups on the accessibility of our qualifications and assessments has provided evidence of disadvantage to particular groups. For example, evidence from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ equality groups such as Aphasic, on the accessibility of the language of external examination question papers ◆ disabled candidates via specific candidate questionnaires on the provision of digital question papers ◆ specific feedback and comment from stakeholders on the accessibility of particular qualifications and assessments for candidates on the grounds of some of the protected characteristics <p>Analysis of data from relevant investigations into qualification uptake and attainment carried out by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and predecessor equality organisations; the Equal Opportunities Committee, Disability Rights Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality into disadvantage.</p>

Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Carry out SQA's Equality Review of Qualifications process for all new and revised SQA qualifications and assessments ◆ Provide appropriate training for Qualifications Development staff and appointees, with supporting documentation to help them complete the Equality Review process ◆ Provide regular updates on the progress in relation to completion of SQA's Equality Review process to SQA committees ◆ Ensure assessments are designed to be accessible to reduce barriers to access and participation ◆ Ensure that a minimum of one annual research seminar has an equality focus ◆ Carry out equality impact assessments of qualification and assessment policies and guidance/procedures (internal and external) ◆ Carry out equality impact assessments of operational and business systems policies and procedures ◆ Identify any barriers arising from centre delivery of qualifications and assessments through quality assurance activity ◆ Continue engagement through the work of SQA's Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group ◆ Investigate how the evidence base available could be improved to understand trends and issues for uptake, attainment and progression in relation to the protected characteristics of race, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief.
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Measure the progress in implementation of SQA's Equality Review of Qualifications process in line with plan for new and revised qualifications ◆ Number of staff trained and the evaluation of staff training in the Equality Review of Qualifications to determine its effectiveness ◆ Seek and evaluate feedback from equality group stakeholders on accessibility of SQA's qualifications and assessments ◆ Completion of equality impact assessments by April 2015
Equality Outcome 5 Eliminate unlawful treatment and advance equality of opportunity for disabled candidates through promoting and implementing effective procedures and processes for the provision of reasonable adjustments in SQA assessments.	
Evidence	<p>Published research from sources such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Government has shown that there is a dramatic difference in the educational attainment of people who have disabilities and those who do not, and that lack of formal qualifications limits employment opportunities.</p>
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide and promote appropriate use of assessment arrangements for all SQA qualifications to increase access to SQA qualifications for disabled candidates through effective guidance for candidates and centres ▪ Maintain established contact with disability groups to ensure awareness of appropriate use of assessment arrangements ▪ Investigate new opportunities to work with equality groups on aspects of access to qualifications ▪ Analyse volume of assessment arrangements requests received and supported to establish trends and the possible reasons for them ▪ Investigate appropriate use of assistive technology for disabled candidates <p>Review the policy on Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications on an annual basis</p>

	Review and revise assessment arrangement guidance for parents and candidates (including promotion of amended guidance via SQA's website).
Measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Monitoring the reduction in number and types of equality issues raised in relation to access to SQA's qualifications ◆ Seeking and monitoring feedback, including candidate feedback, about the positive impact /effect of reasonable adjustment /assessment arrangements made ◆ Monitoring the reduction in the number of requests for exceptional assessment arrangements/reasonable adjustments for individual candidates as a measure of the accessibility of the standard assessment arrangements of SQA's qualifications and assessments
Equality Outcome 6	Advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between male and female learners through encouraging non-traditional subject choices for SQA qualifications offered in schools, colleges and in vocational training. In the longer term, working with our partners, we aim to increase the representation of female and male learners in non-traditional courses
Evidence	Existing SQA statistics provide evidence on the uptake rates of non-traditional subjects. For example, women are less likely than men to undertake engineering and technology courses, directly impinging on equality of employment opportunities. Men are less likely than women to undertake courses in care, directly impinging on equality in employment.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Provide support and guidance for learners and/or centres; for example, through the use of case studies. ◆ Carry out a research project to investigate the impact of different assessment approaches on male and female learners in new National Qualifications. For example, does completing a project advantage male learners, or sitting a written test advantage female learners?
Measures	Monitor the increase in uptake of non-traditional subjects by gender.
Equality Outcome 7	Access to, and experience of, customer-facing activities and services will advance equality of opportunity.
Evidence	Evidence gathered from existing sources has not identified any areas of disadvantage. However, these sources are about general customer-facing service and awareness and do not focus on experience specifically related to equality.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Review our customer feedback mechanisms to explore possible options of including aspects that will allow SQA to gather more specific data on access/experience in relation to equality of opportunity ◆ Raise staff awareness about equality issues and customer-facing activities and service.
Measures	Responses from customers should demonstrate that our customer-facing activities and services continue to advance equality of opportunity.

Equality Outcome 8	Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation by working with the approved awarding bodies to ensure that the policies and practices of the approved awarding bodies give due regard to equality of opportunity in relation to the protected characteristics and, where appropriate take appropriate regulatory action to address any discrimination.
Evidence	Have sight of relevant policies, processes etc from approved awarding bodies.
Contributory actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Conduct an initial review all approved awarding bodies' Equality and Diversity policies to ensure that no learners in Scotland are disadvantaged – encourage regular review by awarding bodies to ensure currency and compliance with legislation. ◆ Work in partnership with awarding bodies to improve access to qualifications through a full review of all approved awarding bodies' Reasonable Adjustment and Special Considerations Policies to ensure these are fair and appropriate. ◆ Review regulatory audit practices to ensure that audits and centre monitoring visits consider the implementation of the relevant policies of each approved awarding body. ◆ Ensure that Accreditation staff receive appropriate development and training are confident in their knowledge of what “equality and diversity” mean for their role. ◆ Revise guidance within <i>SQA Accreditation Regulatory Principles (2011)</i> to specifically reference equality requirements. ◆ Provide regular updates on the progress of the above to the Accreditation Committee. ◆ Keep under review accreditation and regulation processes to ensure that equality awareness is maintained. ◆ Gather evidence from Awarding Bodies of their approach to equality.
Measures	Equality data gathered from Awarding Bodies for example data on the number of requests for special arrangements.

The process of developing equality outcomes

In developing our equality outcomes, we used the expertise available within the existing framework that oversees our compliance with the equality duties. This allowed us to build on work from previous years.

To ensure that SQA's outcomes were comprehensive the Equality Steering Group agreed with the Executive Team that outcomes should be considered in relation to both of SQA's functions and all of its most significant areas of expenditure:

Areas of expenditure

- 1 SQA employees and potential employees (applicants)
- 2 SQA Appointees
- 3 SQA Contractors

Functions

- 4 SQA Accreditation
- 5 SQA Awarding Body

For each area, proposed responsibilities for the development of draft actions and measures were assigned to our equality sub-groups. We identified actions and measures that would help SQA to work towards compliance with the public sector equality duty.

Our draft equality outcomes have been informed by the evidence that is available. This includes our own and others' statistical information, as well as informed professional judgement based on experience in the sector, and feedback from previous engagement work.

We were required to take reasonable steps to involve equality groups and communities, and to consider evidence relating to equality groups. There is more detailed information on the evidence we have considered and identified in the next section.

Consultation and involvement

We are committed to working in partnership with staff, customers and stakeholders to gather information to inform the development of SQA's Equality Outcomes.

Involvement is important in ensuring our equality outcomes have the correct focus, and that they are relevant to SQA's functions and responsibilities under the public sector equality duty. Our experience is that regular and meaningful consultation and dialogue are of great value in informing our strategic decision making.

Colleagues across SQA worked together to develop SQA's equality outcomes, informed by available evidence. As part of this work we invited feedback from a number of stakeholder groups, SQA staff, appointees and centres.

This dialogue, which built on SQA's strong relationships with equality representative groups, took place between November 2012 and February 2013. During that time we:

- ◆ Published SQA's draft equality outcomes on the SQA website and Appointee Management web page
- ◆ Shared the draft equality outcomes with colleagues working with individuals affected by the protected characteristics
- ◆ Invited feedback from 1836 SQA Centres and 6842 Appointees as part of our equality questionnaire.
- ◆ Invited feedback from staff as part of SQA's staff equality questionnaire.
- ◆ Invited SQA's recognised trade union representatives to seek feedback from their equality network groups.

We are grateful to everyone who provided their feedback. From the feedback, it was clear that our staff and appointees think that SQA is delivering well in many areas, but that we need to do more.

Summary of staff feedback

- ◆ The majority of staff who responded felt SQA was supportive of both male and female employees, employees of all ages, those with a disability, with a long term illness, employees of all races and ethnicity and sexual orientation
- ◆ Almost half of respondents confirmed that they were unaware of SQA's employment monitoring responsibilities and that they did not know they should/could volunteer their equality data, but almost half of respondents had registered their data. Some staff stated that they would prefer not to give this data.
- ◆ A small number of respondents asked for greater transparency and openness in respect of the recruitment process.
- ◆ The majority of staff who responded agreed the draft equality outcomes were appropriate for SQA.

Around 15% of 750 staff responded to the survey. This response rate could suggest that there is a low awareness of equality issues, or that staff, generally, are happy so did not see the need to complete the questionnaire. Consideration is being given to the opportunity for staff focus groups to explore this feedback in more detail with staff face to face, if desired.

Summary of appointee feedback

- ◆ The majority of appointees who responded agreed that SQA's process for recruitment, performance management process and training promote fairness and equality of opportunity.
- ◆ The majority of appointees agreed that the draft equality outcomes were appropriate for SQA — although some appointees raised one or two questions in relation to knowledge and understanding of SQA's policies and procedures.

Around 3% of 6842 appointees surveyed responded to the questionnaire.

Summary of centre feedback

- ◆ The majority of respondents agreed that the design of SQA's qualifications and assessments eliminates discrimination and promotes equality of opportunity
- ◆ The majority of respondents agreed that SQA's policies and processes are fair and promote equality of opportunity
- ◆ The majority of respondents agreed that SQA's process for recruitment of appointees is fair and promotes equality of opportunity
- ◆ The majority of respondents agreed that the draft equality outcomes were appropriate for SQA.
- ◆ A few respondents reminded us to avoid using technical language.

Around 4% of 1836 centres surveyed responded to the questionnaire. This includes responses from schools, colleges, employers and training providers in Scotland and wider markets.

Summary of online feedback

- ◆ The majority of respondents agreed the draft equality outcomes were appropriate for SQA
- ◆ Suggestions for consideration included:
 - 'SQA should allow for regular review of these outcomes to ensure adjustments are made when required.'
 - 'It is important to ensure that everyone associated with SQA is aware of their responsibilities.'

The responses we received were considered by SQA's equality sub-groups. A number of helpful suggestions for changes to text have been considered and taken on board.

A large number of comments were very positive. This perhaps reflects the dialogue SQA maintains on an ongoing basis.

We intend to continue to involve these groups further in the implementation and monitoring of SQA's Equality Strategy. We consider this critical to success in meeting our responsibilities and in achieving these equality outcomes.

How we will manage equality

Governance and responsibilities

SQA's Board of Management exercises its duty to ensure compliance, and governs the implementation of the Equality Framework, Strategy and action plans. SQA's Audit Committee oversees the fulfilment of our equality duties on behalf of the Board. SQA's Chief Executive is accountable for the fulfilment of SQA's equality duties, and is supported in this by SQA's Equality Steering Group. Its key responsibilities include:

- ◆ Considering implications for SQA of relevant legislative developments.
- ◆ Approving ongoing development of SQA's Equality Framework and Strategy.
- ◆ Promoting and advocate increased organisational understanding of SQA's equality obligations.
- ◆ Ensuring consistency across the organisation in SQA's approach to fulfilling these obligations.

There are Equality sub-groups for each of SQA's Directorates, and these report to the Equality Steering Group. These sub-groups provide guidance and support for meeting the equality duties, as well as sharing good practice and solutions to common issues across business teams. They will monitor and promote implementation of the actions contributing to SQA's equality outcomes, overseen by the SQA Equality Steering Group.

SQA will publish reports on its progress in relation to equality as part of its existing public performance reporting framework, including within its Annual Report & Accounts. It will also publish a dedicated Equality report at least every two years.

Consultation, involvement and partnership

SQA has strong links with a number of organisations in the area of equality, as well as drawing on existing stakeholder arrangements, including its Advisory Council, Qualifications Committee, Accreditation Committee and Equality & Inclusion Key Partners' Group while preparing for and developing its equality outcomes.

As its moves forward into implementation of actions contributing to its equality outcomes, SQA will further build on these links to ensure that its decisions are based on robust evidence and reflect the needs of the communities it serves.