

Equality Impact Assessment

Awarding Meetings and Grading for National Courses (revised policy)

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requires SQA to have due regard to the need to:

- ◆ eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- ◆ advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- ◆ foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

SQA has a responsibility to assess the impact of new or modified policies and practices against these needs.

Accordingly, this is an EqIA of the Awarding Meetings and Grading for National Courses policy. This highlights the key themes, potential impacts on learners and mitigating actions.

This EqIA is underpinned by other work SQA takes to meet its PSED. As an Awarding Body, SQA works with schools, colleges, universities, industry and government, to ensure that qualifications, including National Courses, are inclusive and accessible to all, recognising the achievements of learners, and providing clear pathways to further learning or employment. The [SQA Awarding Body Code of Practice](#) outlines how SQA ensures that its qualifications are of a high quality and fit for purpose, and that the assessment of these qualifications is monitored and maintained to a consistently high standard. By doing so, it sets out the framework by which SQA safeguards the integrity of SQA's qualifications and assessment standards and ensures public confidence.

The Code of Practice is based on a set of 13 governing principles, which govern how SQA meets its statutory duties and self-regulates its activities. Similar principles apply to SQA qualifications that are regulated by other organisations.

Governing Principle 7 is specifically related to equalities issues and states that: '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 SQA 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 will be taken to ensure that we:

- ◆ Produce qualifications based on national standards, which are as accessible as possible. We will equality review our qualifications to identify any aspects that might adversely impact learners who share particular characteristics. We will aim to remove such adverse impacts, wherever possible, and minimise them where it is not possible to remove them altogether.
- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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 in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Awarding and Grading

Awarding is a key component of SQA's statutory duties and responsibilities as outlined in our Awarding Body Code of Practice. Awarding meetings are held following each exam diet and involve the setting of grade boundaries. This process involves using a mixture of subject expertise, and qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate exam performances and aims to ensure the level of demand and standard is appropriately set for the upper A, A and C grade boundaries. Once the boundaries are determined at these grades, the remaining boundaries are computed and the decision is applied consistently to all learners. Further information can be found in SQA's [A Guide to Setting Grade Boundaries](#). This information is publicly available on the SQA website and aims to ensure the process is open and transparent.

The revised policy on Awarding Meetings and Grading for National Courses outlines SQA's approach to grading and awarding, which is a key component of standard setting for all Awarding Bodies. The grading criteria and awarding process is applied

consistently to all learners in the cohort, regardless of protected characteristics or socio-economic status. This ensures the awarding process is objective and avoids prejudice and discrimination. Information about the identities of individual learners and centres is not made available to the panel making awarding decisions. This process contributes positively to *equality of opportunity* in terms of the PSED.

One of the benefits of an exam diet is that it ensures all learners are undertaking the same assessment, at the same time, under the same conditions. This removes the potential for unfairness that may be found in other forms of assessment, a fact that was highlighted by some learners during SQA's consultation around the approach to awarding in 2021-22. The views of learners and stakeholders with a particular interest in equalities were integrated into the decision-making process to ensure the approach to awarding and grade boundaries in 2022 meets SQA's equality responsibilities and requirements as an Awarding Body. The importance of ensuring fairness to all learners is at the centre of the awarding process in all years. One area where SQA is undertaking further work to increase transparency is by making the awarding process, which is a highly technical exercise, more accessible to learners. An accessible learner resource was designed and published on the website, which will be reviewed and updated in the coming months – [Setting the Grade: SQA's Awarding Procedure](#).

This policy and any supporting guidance will be reviewed on an ongoing basis. The following section of the document outlines some key actions that support the development and implementation of the policy.

Equality Impact Assessment (supporting guidance available)

Action Plan

This section is completed at the end of the Equality Impact Assessment. Due to the importance of embedding equality in SQA through our actions the Action Plan will be the focus and record of ongoing actions.

Agreed Schedule Review Date	31/08/2023	Additional Schedule Review Date	n/a
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Explain how you will monitor and record the actual impact on equality groups, including how the evidence can be revisited to measure the actual impact.

Required Actions	Owner	Date	Comment & Review
Actions taken to monitor the implementation of policy and the impact on equality groups (evidence and consultation)			[ONGOING RECORD]
To ensure that the approach to awarding and setting grade boundaries is communicated to all learners effectively	Policy owner	01/09/2022	A methodology report and Equalities Monitoring Report, as well as supporting communications are published on Results Day (09/08/2022)
That the Equalities Monitoring Report published annually at the end of each session outlines our approach and our commitment to ensuring all learners are considered and treated equally	Policy owner/Equalities team	Annually	A methodology report and Equalities Monitoring Report, as well as supporting communications are published on Results Day (09/08/2022)

Policy Aims

Name of Policy or practice	Awarding Meetings and Grading for National Courses
New Policy or Revision	Revision
Name of Policy Owner	Research and Policy Manager, Standards
Date Policy Owner Confirmed Completion	18/08/2022

What is the rationale for this policy or practice?
<p>The policy defines SQA's grading structure and method of grading for National Courses and sets out the purpose and frequency of Awarding meetings. The policy also defines the roles and responsibilities of personnel involved in Awarding meetings.</p>
What evidence is there to support the implementation or development of this policy or practice?
<p>Awarding and grading are a core part of SQA's business as an Awarding Body. Notional grading structures are fixed and serve as the basis for determining distinctions between grades – this is common practice.</p> <p>SQA consulted with small groups of learners about the awarding process and the way grade boundaries are determined in the context of arrangements for 2021-22. Wider stakeholder consultation on SQA's approach to standard setting and maintenance also formed part of a project led by the Universities of Oxford and Glasgow. SQA is using the findings of these consultations to shape how we communicate with stakeholders about standards, and we are in the process of devising new ways of making the contents of this policy more accessible to the wider public.</p> <p>Following the publication of results, SQA also publishes a statistical breakdown and analysis of outcomes by groups (including equalities groups) in an Equalities Monitoring Report. This is vital to ensuring that this policy, and other relevant policies and processes, remain fit for purpose, support equality of opportunity and support the elimination of unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.</p>

What are the aims of this policy or practice?

The aim of this policy to provide internal staff with a clear policy position on the approach to grading and awarding meetings for the external assessment of graded National Courses. The policy also aims to ensure SQA's approach to grading and awarding meetings is applied consistently to all external assessments and learners.

Awarding is a key component of SQA's statutory duties and responsibilities, as outlined in [SQA Awarding Code of Practice](#). SQA holds meetings to discuss awarding after each exam diet. The purpose of the meetings is to set grade boundaries. The process of setting grade boundaries uses a mixture of specific subject expertise combined with available qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate exam performances. For further details, please consult SQA's [Guide to Setting Grade Boundaries](#).

This policy and approach are designed to deliver fair grades for all candidates. Holding a national exam diet ensures all candidates are undertaking the same assessment, at the same time, under the same conditions. This removes the potential for any unfairness that may result from a purely teacher-led approach to assessment — a fact that was highlighted by some candidates during SQA's engagement activity on the approach to awarding in 2021-22.

How is the content of these aims relevant to equality groups?

The policy applies equally to all learners to ensure a consistency of approach that aims to maximise fairness to all groups of learners including equality groups. Quantitative and qualitative evidence used prior to and during awarding meetings (eg, statistical outcome data and assessment evidence) corresponds to the cohort as a whole. Grade boundary decisions at upper A, A and C are determined using this process and computed for all other grades. This decision is then applied equally to the entire cohort of learners.

*In years when a process such as Script Scrutiny is used, samples of candidate work are randomly selected and anonymised to help awarding meeting panels evaluate the demand of the assessment and performance of candidates at specific grade boundaries.

Evidence, Consultation and Engagement

What stakeholders have you engaged with in the development of this policy or practice?

Learners, Practitioners (Head Teachers), University leaders and Local Authority leaders.

What evidence about equality groups do you have to support this assessment?	
Age	This policy applies to graded National Courses and only applies to learners taking National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications in schools, colleges and training providers. The age range would normally be 15+ and learners that were consulted signed up for focus group sessions and were enrolled in a range of qualifications at schools and colleges in Scotland.
Disability	No specific disability groups were consulted and no learners were asked to declare a disability for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Race	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Religion or Belief	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Sex	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation, but the learners who participated in the consultation were not limited to a single sex. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Sexual Orientation	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Gender Re-assignment (Gender identity and transgender)	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Marriage/Civil Partnership	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Pregnancy / Maternity	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.
Care experience (where relevant)	Learners were not asked for this information for the purposes of the consultation. As noted above, this policy and associated process applies equally to all learners.