



# **Scottish Qualifications Authority**

## **Children's Rights Report — 1 April 2017 to 30 March 2020**

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## **Introduction**

Welcome to SQA's first Children's Rights Report, covering the period 1 April 2017 to 30 March 2020.

Section 2 of the Children and Young People Act (Scotland) 2014 specifies a requirement for this three-year report. This report will be accompanied by an interim update report covering the period 1 April 2020 to 31 January 2022.

This approach balances the legislative requirements with providing stakeholders with clarity on our most up-to-date position.

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)<sup>1</sup>.

While reporting periods should ordinarily be three years, the timescale for completing the first Children's Rights Report was extended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SQA's ambition is to become a leading public body in ensuring that children's rights are recognised, as set out in the UNCRC. This will reflect our purpose of helping people to fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions.

This report highlights the actions we have taken during the reporting period to support children and young people in Scotland to realise their rights.

## **Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)**

SQA is the national accreditation and awarding body for Scotland. Our purpose is to help people to achieve and fulfil their potential. We do this 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 candidates each year, positively impacting on them, their families and on society.

A young person's school or college acts as an intermediary in our engagement with young people. Our direct interactions with children and young people are limited. However, we understand our responsibilities and duties to young people and work hard to ensure that their voices are heard and their interests are at the centre of all that we do.

## **SQA Accreditation**

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit to accredit and quality assure qualifications in Scotland, thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers and the Scottish Government. It does this by independently approving and regulating awarding bodies operating in Scotland and accrediting their qualifications, which

include Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Regulatory and Licensing Qualifications, and other competence-based qualifications.

## **Children's rights**

Children and young people have the same human rights as adults. They span the entire spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights. Children and young people also have additional rights that recognise that childhood is a special, protected time, in which children must be allowed to grow, learn, play, develop, and flourish with dignity<sup>2</sup>.

## **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)**

Specific human rights for children are set out in the UNCRC.

The Scottish Government is committed to Scotland being the best place in the world for a child to grow up. The National Outcome for children and young people is that children grow up loved, safe, and respected, so that they reach their full potential. A central part of this vision is the recognition of, respect for, and promotion of children's human rights. These include rights to be treated fairly, to be heard, and to be as healthy as possible<sup>3</sup>.

Embedding the UNCRC in policy and practice is a key way to help advance children's wellbeing.

There are 54 articles in the UNCRC. To make reporting on children's rights simpler, the UN recommends using clusters. We have adopted this approach for this report. These eight clusters group the rights and protocols under themes:

- ◆ general measures of implementation
- ◆ general principles of the UNCRC
- ◆ civil rights and freedoms
- ◆ violence against children
- ◆ family environment and alternative care
- ◆ basic health and welfare
- ◆ education, leisure, and culture
- ◆ special protection measures

## **Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC)**

Scotland's GIRFEC<sup>4</sup> 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 (SHANARRI<sup>5</sup> 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.

## **Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIA)**

The Scottish Government's CRWIA is a tool which those engaging with, or who make decisions which may impact on children, can use to support a child rights-based approach.

SQA has incorporated the CRWIA processes and guidance into our work.

## **Cluster (i) — 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.*

### **Purpose and strategic goals**

SQA remains committed to helping everyone in Scotland to realise their potential and to achieve their ambitions. SQA holds a unique position in Scotland's education and training system, and we are acutely aware of our responsibility to uphold both the accessibility and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system. SQA's qualifications and associated expert services help individuals to progress and develop in their own lives and careers.

SQA is proud to be at the heart of the Scottish education and training system. We play a key role as the provider of the vast majority of qualifications delivered by schools and colleges, and the largest supplier of vocational qualifications.

As an accrediting body, SQA sets and maintains standards for many other awarding bodies, and for accredited qualifications, which provide evidence that learners can do their jobs well (these can be studied in colleges or in the workplace).

SQA also plays an important role in supporting Foundation Apprenticeships and the wider Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) Policy, and our qualifications form part of the majority of Scotland's Modern Apprenticeships.

### **Our strategic goals (from 2019)**

1. Develop and deliver high-quality qualifications, products and services for the benefit of a broad range of learners and of Scotland.
2. Provide leadership and expertise in a range of areas including assessment, qualification development and quality enhancement.
3. Support the Scottish Government's internationalisation agenda to maximise the benefits of international engagement and co-operation.
4. Ensure communication and engagement between SQA and our learners, customers and stakeholders is appropriate, clear and timely, and tailored to their needs.
5. Deliver high-quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive services to our customers.

6. Ensure the culture of our workplace embodies the values of Scotland's Fair Work Framework through its five pillars — effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect — to support the wellbeing of our staff and their commitment to the success of SQA.

7. Continue to develop SQA as a leading public body and key player in the skills, training and education landscape.

8. Continue to pursue a longer-term business model that would enable SQA to reduce its dependency on the public purse and invest in and improve the education and skills system.

9. 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.

## **Our values**

We will continue to live up to our purpose, mission, and vision by putting our values into practice:

### **Trusted**

We are open and transparent in our communication and decision making.

### **Progressive**

We challenge the status quo and embrace new ideas and ways of working.

### **Enabling**

We set and uphold high standards of behaviour in line with our values.

## Cluster (ii) — General principles of the UNCRC

*This cluster focuses on the four general principles of the UNCRC:*

- ◆ *non-discrimination (Article 2): children should not be discriminated against*
- ◆ *best interests of the child (Article 3): every decision and action must be in a child's best interests*
- ◆ *survival and development (Article 6): every child has the right to life and to develop to their full potential*
- ◆ *respect for the views of the child (Article 12)*

### **Article 2: children should not be discriminated against**

The public sector equality duty requires SQA to review policies and activities in order to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity, and to foster good relations between people with different protected characteristics<sup>6</sup>.

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.*

SQA's Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications Policy outlines the organisation's commitment to promoting and facilitating access to our qualifications.

### **Monitoring the implementation of revised National Qualifications**

In light of the removal of unit assessments in Advanced Higher courses in session 2019–20, SQA carried out a further equality review and considered the potential impact on candidates who share protected characteristics, and how potential negative impacts could be mitigated.

The planned monitoring of the implementation of these changes at Advanced Higher in session 2019–20, along with the continued monitoring of revised course assessment at National 5 and Higher, was limited by the cancellation of the exam diet and related closure of the Assessment Arrangements (AAs) system and Exceptional Circumstances service. Over the course of any year, dialogue with centres in relation to these services normally allows us to add to our understanding of the many and varied issues that some of our candidates have. However, for the period from August 2019 to March 2020, it was possible to monitor AA correspondence and requests already received, and carry out planned and responsive engagement with centres, stakeholder groups and education partners. No particular trends or issues for candidates or AAs were identified through monitoring or engagement, either with new implementation of revised Advanced Higher courses or continued implementation of revised National 5 and Higher courses.

Monitoring will be required over a number of years to provide more data that will allow for comparisons in AA request trends to be made over a longer period of time.



## **National Qualifications 2020**

On 19 March 2020, the Deputy First Minister, John Swinney MSP, announced the cancellation of the 2020 examination diet, in line with the latest public health advice. This was the first time Scotland's annual exam timetable has been cancelled since it began in 1888.

## **Support, effective guidance, and training on inclusive design for those involved in the development of assessment**

SQA recognises the very clear links between equality, accessibility, and validity. Assessments that are well designed and accessible will differentiate between those candidates who have the required knowledge, skills, and understanding of the qualification and those who do not. They will not differentiate on other factors, and will provide all candidates with the fairest possible opportunities to show what they know, understand, and can do.

As part of its ongoing programme of supporting professional development and practice, all SQA staff and appointees (Principal Assessors, Principal Verifiers, Item Writers, and Item Checkers) involved in the design of SQA assessments are trained in the principles of assessment and assessment development. This includes training on the principles of validity, reliability, and equality and inclusion.

The programme of professional development was curtailed by COVID-19 during 2019–20, but did include a general unit-writing workshop for Higher National (HN), which took place in December 2019. This training included equality and inclusion content.

We aim to re-establish our programme of regular training opportunities on inclusive design in assessment. Staff and appointees are also 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 as possible.

A guidance document on designing inclusive assessment is available for staff, and a series of design principle handbooks to inform review and development of National Courses has been completed. These include content and guidance on key principles and responsibilities related to equality, inclusion, and access.

## **SQA Accreditation**

SQA Accreditation is committed to reviewing the work of awarding bodies and their approved providers in relation to the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to ensure that the policy and processes do not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics. All awarding bodies have an appropriate RPL policy in place. In our visits to sample approved providers, we found no evidence to suggest discrimination had occurred. SQA Accreditation also undertook to review the special considerations and adjustments to assessment policies of awarding bodies and to review the implementation of these at provider level to ensure that there was no discrimination. Through our auditing and provider monitoring activities, we found no evidence that the way special considerations and adjustments to assessment were applied involved any discrimination.

### **Article 3: every decision and action must be in a child's best interests**

SQA believes that Scotland should develop leading-edge curriculum and qualifications that support areas of national importance and assessment approaches that reflect the skills and knowledge that are critical to learner success and embed the rights of the child.

There are a range of actions SQA takes that are in a child's best interests:

- ◆ SQA overall approach to qualifications is that they are fair to all. This is at the heart of much of SQA's activity, from ensuring exam question papers are kept secure so that everyone has the same chance on the day of the exam, through to maintaining consistent standards over time so that everyone's results are comparable.
- ◆ Appeals: SQA has long had in place a mechanism for learners to challenge their results if they think something has gone wrong. For the Diets in 2017 to 2019 this was the Post Results Service, which allowed for exam scripts and coursework to be reviewed afresh by a subject expert marker.
- ◆ Qualifications Reviews: SQA carries out reviews of all National Qualifications to ensure that they are as accessible as possible for all candidates<sup>7</sup>.
- ◆ Assessment Arrangements: SQA has a process in place that allows for the impact of disability to be mitigated and ensure that as many candidates as possible are able to access SQA's qualifications. This was in place for Diets 2017 to 2019.
- ◆ Exceptional Circumstances: SQA also has in place a process that means that any candidate who is unable to sit an exam through unforeseen circumstances is still able to access an award of a qualification. This was in place for Diets 2017 to 2019.

### **Article 6: every child has the right to life and to develop to their full potential**

Our academic and vocational qualifications give learners in Scotland and beyond an extensive and flexible range of learning opportunities. This helps them develop to their full potential and fulfil their ambitions.

### **Article 12: respect for the views of the child**

SQA carries out a wide range of research and consultations to gather the views of our stakeholders, including learners. Learners 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 learners' experience in Scotland where we can.

We give learners an opportunity and platform to voice their opinions. We listen to them and, where possible, act on their insights for the benefit of all.

In early 2017, SQA set out to create a vision of the ways in which we will develop and make use of new and innovative approaches to qualifications and assessment. SQA invited Young Scot to engage with young people to enable them to present their views in a way that allowed SQA to take them into account as we developed our vision<sup>8,9</sup>.

While immediate progress on the actions identified by the young people was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this was the beginning of SQA working with learners in a different way. When the pandemic began, we had already set the foundations for incorporating learners' views in our qualifications and services.

Most importantly, our work with Young Scot brought a clear recognition across SQA of the importance of seeing learners as a key stakeholder group and engaging with them in a way that reflects this; this was one of the declared outcomes of our work with Young Scot and was reflected in our response to the young peoples' report.

### **Scottish Stakeholder Tracking research**

Our Scottish Stakeholder Tracking research has been carried out annually since 2001. It targets key groups in Scotland, one of which is young people. The research looks at the profile of SQA and our qualifications among Scottish audiences and tracks changes in views through time.

Every year, the Scottish Stakeholder Tracking programme asks learners and their parents and carers about the delivery, clarity and accuracy of SQA certification.

The research we undertake provides an evidence base for the decisions we make. And, in this context, all of the insights we gather feed into our wider understanding of the issues facing learners.

### **Policy Development Tracking research**

SQA's Policy Development Tracking covers concerns in Scottish education, including National Qualifications, DYW, and preparing learners for the workforce, alongside general challenges and issues. The research tracks the views of different audience groups, including learners.

## Cluster (iii) — 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.*

### Guidance and support

SQA provides guidance and support for learners on an ongoing basis.

This includes by:

- ◆ Issuing 'Your Exams' and 'Your Coursework' booklets annually to each National Qualification learner.
- ◆ Providing learners with a means to contact SQA all year round by phone or email with any questions they have about SQA qualifications. We provide enhanced Candidate Advice Line support during the National Qualifications results period.
- ◆ Routinely seeking the views of learners on qualifications and assessment through surveys, consultations, interviews and focus groups. For example, research on Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) qualifications, engagement on HN Next Generation qualifications, and regular tracking surveys seeking the views of learners on a range of qualification assessment issues.
- ◆ MySQA, a service where learners can view their qualification information online and register to receive their National Qualification results by email and/or text alerts.

## **Cluster (iv) — 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'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.

### **Candidate wellbeing**

SQA will endeavour to protect children and adults at risk of harm by identifying, assessing, and putting measures in place to minimise any potential risk of harm to children or adults through SQA activities. This commitment extends across SQA's functions including appointees.

In recognising 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 outline the processes to be adopted if:

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

There are also procedures to ensure that SQA materials and assessments are appropriate in terms of text and language, for example, and that the overall Child Protection Policy and Procedures are annually reviewed<sup>10</sup>.

## Cluster (v) — 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

SQA remains an active and committed corporate parent; a steering group supports a wide range of activities. A corporate parent is an organisation or individual who has special responsibilities for looked-after children and care-experienced young people. The duties of a corporate parent are to:

- ◆ be alert to matters which might adversely affect looked-after children and care-experienced young people's wellbeing
- ◆ assess what services and support they might benefit from
- ◆ promote the interests of looked-after children and care-experienced young people
- ◆ provide them with opportunities to promote their wellbeing
- ◆ take appropriate action to help them access those opportunities
- ◆ improve corporate parenting wherever possible

SQA was enormously proud to be named as a national corporate parent in April 2015<sup>11</sup>. Since then, we have worked hard to improve the lives and futures of Scotland's looked-after and care-experienced children and young people. We fully support the vision of the Scottish Government to make Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. Corporate parenting is an important part of this vision and empowers SQA to make a real difference to the lives of looked-after children and care-experienced young people.

SQA's Corporate Parenting Plan<sup>12</sup> sets out our commitments in five high-level outcomes:

1. SQA understands and is alert to the needs of care-experienced children and young people to inform its policy, planning and practice.
2. Care-experienced children and young people benefit from access to a range of SQA services designed to meet their emotional and physical needs.
3. The ambition and achievements of care-experienced young people are supported, recognised, and acknowledged by SQA.
4. Improve engagement with those organisations who support care-experienced young people and create better awareness of the different opportunities to work with SQA.
5. SQA employees and appointees understand and are aware of the needs of care-experienced young people and SQA's corporate parenting responsibilities.

Each of these outcomes has several associated actions designed to effect real change and have a positive impact for our young people. SQA's corporate parenting steering group

meets quarterly to review our progress in making real, positive differences to care-experienced young people.

So far, in our role as a corporate parent, SQA has:

- ◆ worked with SCRA and CHS to stop children's hearings from clashing with SQA exams
- ◆ ensured that care-experienced young people can get free replacement SQA certificates
- ◆ started incorporating relevant and appropriate situations of young people in care into our qualifications
- ◆ celebrated Results Day<sup>13</sup> every August with a group of care-experienced young learners and Who Cares? Scotland
- ◆ made progress in treating 'care experience' as a protected characteristic, so that being 'inclusive' means looking after care-experienced young people too
- ◆ launched online corporate parenting training for SQA staff

We now plan to:

- ◆ forge even more collaborative relationships with other corporate parents
- ◆ actively seek the views of care-experienced young people, building on our engagement with the Young People's Champions Boards, and relevant support organisations and charities
- ◆ celebrate and acknowledge the achievements of all care-experienced young people during Results Day
- ◆ make employment opportunities for care-experienced young people at SQA clear and accessible
- ◆ develop ideas on tailored training for specific SQA business areas, particularly in qualifications
- ◆ explore ways to offer tangible support to care-experienced young learners, like returning externally assessed artwork without charge

## Cluster (vi) — 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 we:

- ◆ 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
- ◆ 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 AAs to allow disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs to access the assessment without compromising its integrity. For disabled candidates, we make reasonable adjustments in accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010

SQA's equality review of qualifications process is a robust and transparent way of ensuring that:

- ◆ SQA qualifications are reviewed to ensure that they are not discriminatory for any learner on grounds of any of the protected characteristics
- ◆ due consideration is given to the reasonable adjustments that SQA can make to provide access to the qualifications for disabled learners

### Assessment Arrangements (AAs)

SQA continues to promote and provide the appropriate use of AAs, including the use of assistive technologies for disabled candidates, to increase access to SQA qualifications. This is a longstanding policy with a positive impact on learners and their ability to access qualifications and assessment.

SQA works in close partnership with centres and disability stakeholder groups to identify and deliver appropriate AAs for those candidates who need them. The 2019 annual review of policy, guidance, processes and procedures related to the provision of AAs led to agreed actions to be implemented for the 2020 diet. These included:

- ◆ statistical analysis of the AAs data to identify any particular trends in provision



- ◆ issuing guidance and samples to every centre to confirm the suite of six standard colours available for relevant AAs requests, and advising the Scottish Sensory of this for dissemination to their network of visual impairment teachers and centres
- ◆ enhancing our adapted paper artwork guidance to include a list of subjects with optionality. This avoids producing excessively large papers for candidates who require adapted artwork in only those options they will have prepared for (for example, in History)
- ◆ making Open Dyslexic one of the standard font options available on the AAs system
- ◆ providing white copy versions of papers along with requested coloured papers, where coloured images are included, so that candidates can refer to the original for accurate colour reproduction. Updates to our Invigilator Handbook, guidance and operations will be made in accordance with this

These measures were in place for the 2020 diet before its cancellation, and will be implemented once the annual diet of exams is re-established.

Engagement and support for AAs 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 CALL Scotland<sup>14</sup> to understand developments in the range of available assistive technologies that can be used to support learners, and which may be incorporated into AAs. CALL Scotland'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.

Digital question papers	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*	2019*
Number of requests	3,694	4,291	3,540	3,652	4,802	5,888	5,175	6,014
Number of candidates	1,327	1,677	1,487	1,599	2,057	2,398	2,431	2,593

\*Pre-2018 figures include requests from candidates that were subsequently withdrawn. New methods for collating data from 2018 onwards mean these are not included.

## AAs data

AAs requests data is normally analysed annually<sup>15</sup>. Although there are limitations in the information produced because the system 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 AAs, the reasons for them (in terms of broad categories of difficulty), and the patterns of use of different types of arrangements.

The AAs system for session 2019–20 closed shortly after the decision was taken to cancel exams, so there was therefore no complete data to analyse. What is clear from the information available is that, until the system closed, the most common types of AAs requested were extra time and separate accommodation, and the most common types of difficulties recorded were additional support needs, dyslexia, and mental health. This is in common with previous years.

As previously reported, there has been a rise in the number of AAs requests over the last few years.

Year	Number of candidates requesting Assessment Arrangements and as a % of total number of candidates		Number of Assessment Arrangement requests and as a % of all entries	
2014	14,214	10.7%	43,344	8.0%
2015	14,489	11.2%	43,997	8.4%
2016	15,345	12.1%	47,874	9.3%
2017	16,758	13.4%	52,747	10.3%
2018	18,273	14.9%	57,198	11.5%
2019	20,059	16.5%	62,506	12.6%

Note: Up to and including 2017, data includes all requests made in the Alternative Arrangements Requests system. From 2018 onwards, it does not include requests or candidates subsequently withdrawn or classed as invalid.

While it is difficult to identify the specific reason for the year-on-year increase in requests for AAs, it is seen by the majority of practitioners as being positive in that candidates who need AAs are being better identified, at least in some centres.

Social and legislative changes have led to a significant growth in the number of disabled learners in mainstream education and training, and in the number of learners identified as having dyslexia/specific learning difficulties. As a result, SQA and its centres have seen a significant year-on-year growth in the use of AAs for disabled candidates and/or those identified as having additional support needs.

## Quality assuring centres' systems to provide AAs

SQA has a responsibility to ensure that the process of assessment is rigorous and fair for all candidates, and for this reason we must ensure that AAs are appropriate and only provided to those candidates who are eligible. We require that all centres have an effective internal quality assurance system for identifying and verifying candidates' eligibility for AAs in assessments, and the focus of our quality assurance is on assisting centres with this.

Audit visits were carried out from December 2019 to February 2020 in the usual manner, but as no unnecessary visits to centres were permitted, this was not possible for session 2020–21.

## Cluster (vii) — 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.*

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.

### Impact assessments

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- ◆ age
- ◆ disability
- ◆ gender re-assignment
- ◆ pregnancy and maternity
- ◆ race
- ◆ religion or belief
- ◆ sex
- ◆ sexual orientation
- ◆ marriage and civil partnerships

We also consider a wide range of additional factors that we recognise as having an impact on equality of access to qualifications, including:

- ◆ identified physical, medical, sensory, behavioural, mental health or learning difficulties, which mean that some candidates are defined as having additional support needs under the Additional Support for Learning Act (2014)
- ◆ socio-economic and other deprivation indicators as described in the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) and that may present barriers to accessing qualifications
- ◆ contexts for candidates who are care-experienced, home schooled, have interrupted learning or other circumstances that may impact on their access to qualifications

Our impact assessments covering COVID-enforced adjustments to assessment and certification considered the potential effect of the changes on learners with protected characteristics; other groups of learners, such as those who are socio-economically disadvantaged, or who experience other circumstances that present barriers to accessing qualifications, were also considered wherever possible. Although such groups are not covered specifically by the Equality Act 2010, SQA recognises that a wide range of factors can have an impact on a learner's ability to achieve qualifications.

## **Work experience opportunities**

Of all the attributes employers are looking for in new recruits, work experience is still the most common. According to the Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey: 2019, 62% rate it as 'significant' or 'critical'. SQA welcomes work experience placements as part of our commitment to promoting a greater awareness of potential careers and job opportunities for school pupils.

## **Modern Apprenticeships**

SQA's established apprenticeship programmes<sup>16</sup> offer valuable workplace skills and experience for young people. Our Modern Apprenticeships are open to all young people aged between 16 and 19, and up to 29 if they are disabled and/or care-experienced. We offer both one- and two-year Modern Apprenticeship programmes where young people will gain an industry-recognised qualification that will help them to progress in their future career or further education.

For both one- and two-year programmes, Modern Apprentices work towards an SVQ in Business and Administration, which is assessed on-the-job. For the two-year programme, Modern Apprentices also work towards an HNC in Business, which they study at college on day-release.

Throughout the apprenticeship, the Modern Apprentice will also work closely with a career development mentor to help them identify their career goals and gain the right experience from the programme.

## **Cluster (viii) — 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.*

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. SQA recognises that a wide range of factors can have an impact on a learner's ability to achieve qualifications.

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.

## Reflections

SQA is committed to the Scottish Government's ambition that Scotland become the best place for children to grow up and learn. We welcome the incorporation of the UNCRC. Since 2017, SQA has progressed work in a range of areas that helps children realise their rights or improves children's rights in Scotland. We are proud of our achievements in helping children and young people fulfil their potential while maintaining national standards and a credible and fair qualifications system. Highlights include:

- ◆ our corporate parenting works
- ◆ our well-established AA procedures

We recognise, however, we still have a way to go. We are still learning and listening. While we continue to face challenging circumstances in dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and an evolving Scottish education landscape, we are committed to children's rights and hearing and listening to learners in all that we do.

SQA will implement more strategic approaches in embedding a children's rights approach and continue to work and engage with learners and their representatives to ensure that young people — and their rights — are at the heart of our work and of the new organisation.

## Glossary

AAs — Assessment Arrangements	NPFS — National Parent Forum of Scotland
ACM — Alternative Certification Model	NQ — National Qualification
CAB — Curriculum and Assessment Board	RPL — Recognition of Prior Learning
CfE — Curriculum for Excellence	SCRA — Scottish Children’s Reporters Administration
CHS — Children’s Hearings Scotland	SHANARRI — safe, healthy, achieving, nurtured, active, respected, responsible, included
CRWIA — Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment	SIMD — Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
CYPCS — Children and Young People’s Commissioner Scotland	SPARGS — Student Partnerships in Quality Scotland
DYW — Developing the Young Workforce	SPSO — Scottish Public Sector Ombudsman
EHRC — Equalities and Human Rights Commission	SVQ — Scottish Vocational Qualification
EqIA — Equalities Impact Assessment	SYP — Scottish Youth Parliament
GIRFEC — Getting it Right for Every Child	UNCRC — United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
HN — Higher National	

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