

Equality Impact Assessment (supporting guidance available)

Summary

Name of Policy or practice	Hybrid Working Guidance		
New Policy or Revision	Revision		
Policy Owner (role)	Head of Human Resources		
Date Owner Confirmed Completion	31 January 2024		
Agreed Schedule Review Date	31 January 2027	Additional review date (Action review date)	

Action Plan

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

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]
This guidance is under continuous review	HR	31/1/2024	Guidance published
6-month survey completed and analysed	HR	30/9/2024	Consultation with TU's and Management
12-month review.	EMT	12/6/2025	Hybrid working adopted as preferred working style. We know the world of work will continue to evolve. Continuous review will remain, reviewing what's working, and making improvements as needed.
Ongoing consultation between EMT & TU's	EMT	12/25&2/26	No change

Identified Actions	General Equality Duty		Owner	Date	Comment & Review
[LIST]	[CROSS REFERENCE]				
To ensure this remains a positive force, the organisation must actively monitor for 'proximity bias' to ensure that women who utilise hybrid working are not disadvantaged in professional networking or promotion opportunities.	Foster good relations		HR	28/2/2024	Workforce planning and demographics data in place to analyse any trends.
Survey	Role of the Hybrid Survey		HR	30/9/2024	The findings from the survey indicate that staff are broadly content with the place they conduct their work – whether from home or in the office – and that staff have a broadly positive perception of hybrid working. Hybrid working has had a positive impact on various aspects of working and personal lives. And, while open-ended responses reveal some challenges of office-based working surrounding privacy and lack of adequate space, the overall message is that respondents enjoy the work life balance that hybrid working allows. Job satisfaction, personal health and finances, and productivity all seem positively impacted by hybrid working. Staff who state they value the benefits that office working provided also stressed the need for a purpose to come into the office. Overall, Line Managers reported a positive experience of hybrid working. The predominant sentiment is that the flexibility that remote working offers colleagues is invaluable and contributes to employees’ wellbeing and job satisfaction.
	Eliminate Discrimination	To Identify if the policy accidentally disadvantages a protected group.			
	Advance Opportunity	To Identify how flexibility can help underrepresented groups thrive.			
	Foster Good Relations	Identify and mitigate resentment or isolation between different teams.			

Training provisions	Advance equality of opportunity	OD	16/6/2025	Academy module launched 16/6/2025 and line management training updated
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Policy Aims

What is the rationale for this policy or practice?

This guidance document links in with other Qualifications Scotland policies which have a completed equality impact assessment and provides a framework for working arrangements and some key considerations for hybrid and office working. The guidance document has been designed to provide an understanding to all Qualifications Scotland colleagues of what hybrid working means at Qualifications Scotland and contains information to help colleagues understand these provisions.

SQA's Smarter Working Programme (SWP), introduced in response to covid lockdown measures had extensive employee consultation and allowed for flexibility around location and workspace options, enhanced uses of technology in addition to provision of appropriate resources and policies to support this approach generally. Employees have previously discussed with their line manager remote working options and our Hybrid approach within Qualifications Scotland is our next iteration of our approach to work location flexibility.

We identify and recognise that there will be data limitations in relation to all protected characteristics as hybrid working is relatively new. Guidance will therefore be kept under rolling review.

A Blended Hybrid Strategy will continue into Qualifications Scotland post-TUPE (effective February 1, 2026). This approach will continue to balance the need to build a high-trust, supportive culture—critical for staff wellbeing and retention—with the need for a guaranteed baseline of in office presence to drive collaboration and cultural integration. This strategy continues to guide staff to have an office presence for team connection and a collective, team-led aspiration, providing maximum flexibility and demonstrating this will also translate to our new values Connected and Caring.

What evidence is there to support the implementation or development of this policy or practice?

Evidence indicates that hybrid working is a form of flexible working and after the pandemic organisations have introduced hybrid working arrangements which have had a positive impact on employees. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) in association with Harvard Business School shows that hybrid working can offer employees the “best of both worlds” and a greater work life balance while still maintaining social connection and bonds with colleagues. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/planning-hybrid-working/>

[Public sector organisations are more likely to offer hybrid working to employees than private sector particularly in office-based roles.](#)

[ONS have found more than a quarter of working adults in Great Britain \(28%\) were hybrid working in the autumn of 2024.](#)

Qualifications Scotland have to ensure they provide a safe working environment for home workers as detailed in legislation detailed here [Home working - Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#).

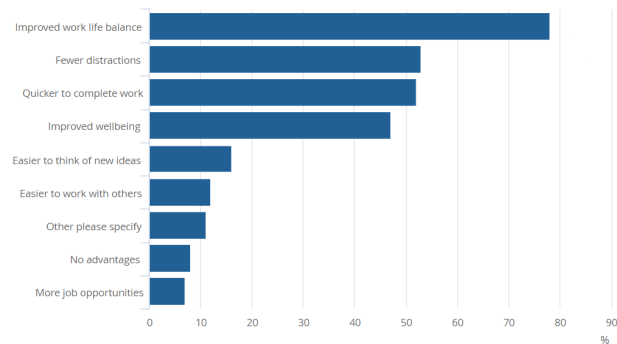
Qualifications Scotland have defined that hybrid working must meet business and job role requirements.

This policy can enhance this generally positive perception further by making processes and decision-making factors clearly understood and consistently applied.

Other benefits for having this policy are outlined here [Work from Home Policy UK | Croner](#)

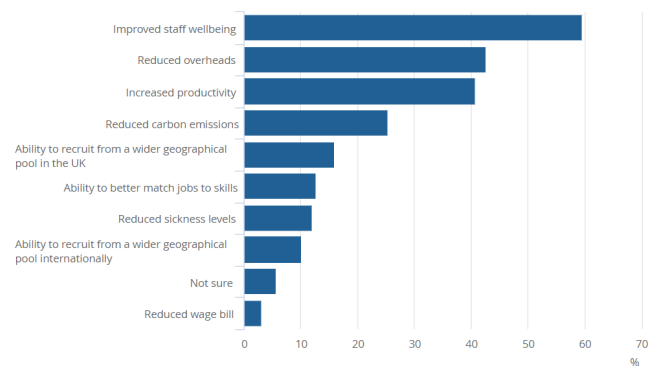
Percentage of homeworkers reporting advantages, Great Britain, 3 - 13

February 2022



Improved staff well-being was the most common reason for businesses using, or planning to use, homeworking permanently

Reasons for adopting homeworking as a permanent business model, businesses not permanently stopped trading, weighted by count, UK, 4 to 17 April 2022



Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey shows the benefits to organisations in having hybrid working, some benefits are improved staff wellbeing, reduced overheads, reduced sickness, and increased productivity.

In the 2025 SQA Colleague Engagement Survey one of the top five aspects all SQA colleagues who completed the staff engagement survey enjoy most about their work at SQA included flexibility afforded at SQA namely about working from home:

“A flexible workplace - being able to work from home helps me manage my health condition and have a positive work life balance.”

“Enjoy the flexibility of working from home, as it allows me to manage my time efficiently and focus on delivering high quality work.”

“The flexibility and benefits are also very good for me to maintain a good work/life balance.”

In 2025 SQA employs 1022 people. A total of 5.28% are designated home-based roles, 2.25% are office roles and 92.47% are hybrid roles. This also highlights the ongoing need in Qualifications Scotland for a guidance document to continue to adapt to changing environments.

What are the aims of this policy or practice?

This guidance document will ensure that employees understand the benefits of hybrid working, allowing flexibility over where they work with blending in office interactions and hybrid. The aim is to help Qualifications Scotland employees understand hybrid working provisions which will allow hybrid workers to flourish, and everyone can benefit.

The following Qualifications Scotland policies are also related to the Hybrid Working Guidance

- Attendance Management Policy
- Clear Desk and Clear Screen Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Dignity at Work Policy
- Disciplinary Policy
- Email Policy
- Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Grievance Policy
- Information Security Policy
- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Stress Mental Health and Wellbeing at Work Policy

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

Qualifications Scotland acknowledges that people who share / do not share, certain 'Protected Characteristics may on balance:

- Have different reasons for benefitting from hybrid working.

Hybrid working offers the best of both worlds according to CIPD who stated that employees benefit from greater work life balance while still maintaining social connections and bonds with colleagues. <https://www.cipd.org/uk/knowledge/guides/planning-hybrid-working/>

XpertHR <https://www.xperthr.co.uk/leading-practice-guides/hybrid-working-4-fairness-and-inclusion/166437/>

make a clear positive link between hybrid working and inclusion, while acknowledging there are challenges to be met. The ways in which hybrid working practices are implemented appear to play a significant role in inclusion experiences so ensuring a fair approach to hybrid work would

include giving access to flexible working and to those whose roles do not immediately lend themselves to hybrid working, (in Qualifications Scotland this would be operational and customer service team roles). It is important too to consider how to ensure consistency around decisions made in agreeing hybrid working arrangements.

For positive impacts, we took into account the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee 2016 report <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmwomeq/584/58402.htm> significant, stating that "flexible working for all lies at the heart of addressing the gender pay gap".

The report outlines that offering hybrid work combined with other flexible working options (Qualifications Scotland have Flexible Working, Compassionate Leave and Flexitime policies too) can make a difference to addressing some of the issues that lead to gender pay gaps. House of Commons Library: The Gender Pay Gap (November 2025)

More recently The House of Commons Library released an updated Research Briefing in November 2025 [UK Parliament Research Briefing \(Nov 2025\)](#) ONS Statistical Bulletin: Gender Pay Gap in the UK (October 2025). As of April 2025, the median gender pay gap for all employees stood at 12.8%, down from 13.1% in 2024.

It also notes that 78% of reporting employers still pay men more than women.

The ONS [ONS Gender Pay Gap 2025](#) House of Commons: 2024-25 Gender Pay Gap Report provides the raw data that the House of Commons committees use for their inquiries.

The gap for full-time employees has fallen to 6.9% (April 2025), down from 7.1% in 2024. The data shows a negligible gap for workers in their 20s and 30s, but a substantial gap emerges for those aged 40 and over, often linked to the "motherhood penalty."

The University of Kent & NBER (2025), women's earnings historically decline by 42%–60% post-birth due to workforce attrition or moving to lower paid part-time roles.

For every 10% increase in work from home (WFH) availability, the motherhood employment gap narrows by approximately 1%.

Anglia Ruskin University (2025) data indicates that 15% of fathers now work primarily from home, compared to 12% of mothers in the UK. This shift challenges the historical 14% "fatherhood premium" (where men's pay rises post-child) versus the maternal pay cut. Increased male presence at home facilitates shared domestic labour, enabling women to maintain the "Upper Pay Quartile" roles essential for closing the organisational pay gap.

With 91% of UK employers offering flexible work (CIPD 2025), "flexibility stigma" is decreasing. It is no longer viewed as a gender-specific accommodation but as a standard operational model. 80% of employees report improved quality of life, and 33% cite positive impacts on career

prospects. This ensures women remain on the promotion track during mid-career years—the period where the gender pay gap typically begins to widen most significantly.

Hybrid work can significantly reduce the cost of commuting important especially for those in lower paid roles and/or responsible for care at home as it cuts down travel time.

There are also general benefits to attract talent from a wider geographical base and, potentially more diverse groups.

We considered potential disadvantages to equality groups and found that there are indications highlighted here.

<https://www.linkedin.com/business/marketing/blog/brand/attracting-and-keeping-talent-as-hybrid-working-becomes-the-norm> that remote working (typically meaning home-based and/or some other form of hybrid working arrangement) can mean up to 32% more likely to struggle with work life balance, highlighted a general need to ensure some form of person-to-person connection/interaction is essential to consider in day to day work activities. 'Feeling [disconnected from coworkers and leadership](#) was among the biggest complaints of the early remote working days. One of the best ways to keep employees engaged is to offer clear channels for communication and regular opportunities to check in – both professionally and socially.'

There is an extensive range of research to suggest that flexible working is of particular benefit to a range of underrepresented groups, including people with disabilities, carers, neurodiverse people, and those with young families, for example. [How a return-to-office could impact workplace DEI | Hays](#)

We also considered potential negative impacts around the perception that you need to be seen in the office in order to progress (although there is no evidence to show that this is a big issue at Qualifications Scotland), this is a perception that anecdotally exists generally within workplaces. We looked at information like [Presenteeism: 80% of UK employees work when sick – Work in Mind](#).

We also considered whether working out with the office could potentially negatively affect anyone as the increased costs of heating/lighting, electricity demands, broadband, also desk/table or having sufficient working space, could cause increased demand on personal finances, particularly impacting on those on low incomes. There are provisions to apply for a tax refund through HMRC if an employee is designated as a home worker, and Qualifications Scotland provides access to many discounted products and services as well as a financial and debt management advice service through the Employee Assistance Programme Benefits

There are evidenced issues potentially affecting any equality group caused by loneliness, insecurity and social anxiety from lone working [Lone working - Health and Safety Executive \(HSE\)](#) and [Impacts of Lone Working on Mental Health - Diverse Minds](#). While general mental wellbeing is referenced within the guidance.

In summary, we acknowledge that some employees with certain ‘Protected Characteristics’ are on balance, more likely to benefit from hybrid working. This may be a particularity relevant consideration in respect of Disability, Age, and Sex.

Evidence, Consultation and Engagement

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

We shared this guidance document with SQA recognised trade unions Unite and Unison, People and Culture Group, Executive Management Team, Senior Leadership team, and Equality Management Resource Group.

In addition, as this is an internal guidance, SQA consulted with these internal groups in February 2024.

- ACE (Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity) Network.
- SQA Disability Network.
- MAC (Make A Change Group).
- Mental Health First Aiders Forum.
- SQA Rainbow Network.
- Women’s Network.
- Parent & Carers Network
- Young Talent Network
- Men’s Shed Network

other sources drawn upon:

1. Data collected through staff surveys (including Smarter working pulse survey May and August 2022) [Pulse Surveys — thank you for your feedback \(sharepoint.com\)](#) and [SQA Colleague Engagement Survey May 2025](#)
2. Benchmarking across public sector [Benchmarking list.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#)
3. Desk top research (including ACAS [Work and employment law advice | Acas](#), CIPD [About us | CIPD](#), Xpert HR [About us | XpertHR.co.uk](#) best practice sites and cited references throughout the document)
4. Advice and guidance on law provided by Brodies Legal Services [About Brodies LLP law firm](#)

5. EHRC – As part of the Flexible Working Taskforce, they helped CIPD create new hybrid working guidance for employers. [Effective hybrid working: practical guidance | CIPD](#)
6. Office of National Statistics [Home - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) [Home and hybrid working, Great Britain - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)
7. Working families [The Flexible Working Taskforce launches new employer guidance on hybrid working to promote best practice - Working Families](#)

What evidence about equality groups do you have to support this assessment?

Age

In all four years since 2021, 63.79% or more of staff are between the ages of 35 and 59.

The 16–24 and 65+ age brackets had the smallest percentage of staff. In 2024-2025, those within these age brackets made up 3.47% of the organisation. We note that this is a 5.09% decrease across these two age groups since 2021.

We have initiatives in place to support the recruitment and retention of young talent (people aged 16–24), offering:

- intern opportunities for young people aged between 16–24 and up to 29 if an individual is disabled or care experienced.
- the Career Ready mentoring programme, which connects young people aged 15–18 with mentors within the organisation.
- a Young Talent staff network group. The aim of this group is to give our younger staff support to become more confident, improve job satisfaction, and increase skills and abilities by taking on internal and external opportunities. It also allows our staff the chance to grow their connections around the organisation.
- a young talent development mentoring programme providing additional support and guidance on employability skills.

During the reporting periods from 2021 to 2024 there has been an increase of greater than 1.00% of staff within the following age brackets: 25–29 (up by 4.09%), 45–49 (up by 2.88%) and 60–64 (up by 1.22%), and a decrease of greater than 1.00% of staff within the following age brackets: 16–24 (down by -3.05%), 35–39 (down by -2.32%), 65+ (down by -2.04%) and 50–54 (down by -1.93%). Table 1.1 shows the age profile of the organisation from 2021 to 2024.

Table 1.1 shows the age profile of the organisation from 2021 to 2024.

[In 2025 in the UK Workers aged between 30 to 49 years were the most likely to hybrid work.](#)

Nationally, [Carer Positive the standard for employers in creating supportive working environment for carers](#) state:

90% of working carers are over the age of 30, with the peak age for caring between the ages of 45 – 64. Almost half of carers (46%) were people aged 46-65. The percentage of carers who are aged 31 to 45 and 66+ increases with greater hours of care. By contrast, the share of carers aged 15 to 30 and aged 46 to 65 falls with weekly hours of care. This is important as the need to care may impact on the person's accessibility to work from home.

[UNISON - the public service union](#) states: It is common that many older workers having caring responsibilities for older relatives or grandchildren.

[The decline of homeownership among young adults | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)
[Why are more young people living with their parents? - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

Both highlight the fact that younger people are more likely to live in shared accommodation and be more likely to live at home with parents.

Generally, research shows that younger people found it more difficult to work from home during the pandemic, likely because of shared accommodation, lack of comfortable working spaces, having less experience of navigating professional life, or not having such established networks in the same way as more experienced and older colleagues. Ipsos's [Young people and working from home \(WFH\) in the pandemic research](#) reported that many young people wish to work from home for three days a week or more but also need face-to-face time with colleagues, and that they are also more likely to state that working from home puts pressure on their health and wellbeing.

"The transition to hybrid working in Scotland presents a dual-edged reality for young people. While the model provides valuable flexibility, it risks creating a '**development gap**' caused by reduced face-to-face interaction and the erosion of traditional mentorship. Evidence suggests these structural shifts can negatively affect mental wellbeing, as young workers frequently report feeling disconnected and unsupported in remote-heavy environments." [Briefing | Flexible and hybrid working practices in Scotland in 2025 | CIPD](#)

SQA's own research [Young Talent experiences of Hybrid Working](#), noted the developmental and cultural limitations of the hybrid model.

It is clear from the below table that a consistent presence is required to deliver core organisational value (collaboration, spontaneous learning, team cohesion) that the Young Talent population recognises is currently missing and best achieved in the office. Office presence consistency addresses the widespread issues of isolation and fragmentation reported in the current model.

Area	Evidence from Findings	What Office Presence Provides
Collaboration & Cohesion	Young Talent consistently reported that "collaboration were more effective when done face-to-face" and that team dynamics felt "fragmented."	Guarantees the necessary in-person critical mass for high-value collaboration and team building.
Professional Development	"On-the-job learning" and "off-the-cuff learning" (e.g., shadowing, seeing a colleague's screen) are "harder to	Ensures exposure and practical experience needed to "build our skills" and "network" that are difficult to secure remotely.

	replicate remotely." Employees lack essential in-person skills and networking ability.	
Purpose & Value	Office time often feels pointless or isolating because "other team members are not guaranteed to be present." Young Talent asked, "What is the point in sitting in an empty office?"	Enforces the consistency of presence required to make office time truly "purposeful" and valuable for everyone.
Consistency & Expectations	The current system is inconsistent across teams, causing confusion, and does not align with the expectation advertised to new joiners.	Establishes a single, clear expectation that resolves the observed "perceived lack of consistency" and manages new hire expectations.
One participant noted, they "didn't know how to function in a meeting room" initially, but "after a few times of doing it, you learn."		

[ONS.Gov.UK](#) this data from ONS shows us that, nationally people under 30 and older over 50 workers were least likely to have some form of hybrid working arrangement though the numbers working from home are very similar across age groups. It is important to note this given that Qualifications Scotland's workforce falls mainly into the age group most likely to be working some form of hybrid working.

The shift towards working from home may help enable older workers to remain in the labour market for longer. [Living longer: impact of working from home on older workers - Office for National Statistics](#)

"For workers aged 55 and over in Scotland, hybrid working serves as a vital tool for workforce participation and phased retirement. Research shows that **58%** of this demographic already engage in flexible work, signalling a clear departure from the traditional 9-5 model. By accommodating preferences for reduced or non-standard hours, hybrid arrangements help organisations retain 'institutional memory' and combat skills shortages. This flexibility is not merely a perk but a strategic necessity for keeping experienced, knowledgeable staff active in the Scottish economy as they approach retirement." [Briefing | Flexible and hybrid working practices in Scotland in 2025 | CIPD](#)

Disability

Table 3.1: Disability

Disability	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %	Difference (number)	Difference %
No	683	68.78%	697	67.28%	718	65.99%	677	63.51%	-6	-5.27%
Not specified	152	15.31%	184	17.76%	200	18.38%	212	19.89%	60	4.58%
Prefer not to say	76	7.65%	72	6.95%	73	6.71%	67	6.29%	-9	-1.36%
Yes	82	8.26%	83	8.01%	97	8.92%	110	10.32%	28	2.06%
Total	993	100%	1036	100%	1088	100%	1066	100%	73	7.35%

The percentage of staff declaring a disability has increased by 2.06% between 2024 and 2021. Analysis of disability data by grade between 2021 and 2024 identified no significant trends. In both 2023 and 2024, grade 5 (11.86% and 15.25%) had the highest percentage of staff declaring a disability.

In 2024, the proportion of staff working full-time (10.74%) who had declared a disability was 3.84% higher than the proportion of staff working part-time (6.90%) who had declared a disability. In addition, the proportion of staff on permanent contracts who had declared a disability was similar to the proportion of staff on fixed-term contracts who have declared a disability. In 2023, 8.46% of those on permanent contracts and 15.49% of those on fixed-term contracts declared a disability, and in 2024, 10.35% of those on permanent contracts and 9.52% of those on fixed-term contracts declared a disability.

Looking over the four-year period from 2021 to 2024 there do not appear to be any significant trends. Of those staff who have declared a disability, females made up 57.73% (2023) and 57.27% (2024) of the population, and males 42.27% (2023) and 42.73% (2024).

Due to the low number of staff declaring a disability within Qualifications Scotland we are unable to publish further intersectional data in relation to disability and other protected characteristics. Table 3.1 shows the composition of the disability self-reporting categories for the period from 2021 to 2024.

Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25

[Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25](#)

In the UK generally, [Mental Health Foundation | Good mental health for all](#) indicates 1 in 6 adults experience a common mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression.

[Inclusion Scotland - Inclusion Scotland](#) survey that highlights the impact of covid-19 on carers and people with disabilities in terms of the reduction in social care support and increased pressure on carers to cover gaps in care. And care has continued to be eroded as described in this 2025 [Press Release: Disabled People's Organisations criticise "institutionalised ignorance" from an "ableist state" in the pandemic and say nothing has changed - Inclusion Scotland](#)

[Brightmine highlight effective employee mental health benefits](#) which includes a mindfulness space where colleagues can take a break and relax. This is in place in both offices as a Wellness Room accessible to all colleagues.

[Benefits to attending the office for mental health](#) include Establishing structure and routine, Fostering social connections, Promoting a healthy work life balance, Mitigating distractions and improving focus and Building supportive networks.

The transition to hybrid working models represents a transformative development for disability inclusion in the Scottish workforce, aligning closely with the Scottish Government's [Fair Work First](#) criteria. For many disabled employees, the ability to work from home removes the "physical tax" associated with traditional employment. Research by [Scope](#) indicates that a significant majority of disabled workers feel more productive when working remotely, as it eliminates the exhaustion of the daily commute and allows for precise control over environmental factors such as lighting, acoustics, and ergonomic setups. This autonomy is critical for managing chronic pain, fatigue, and neurodivergent needs, ultimately supporting the [Scottish Government's goal](#) of halving the disability employment gap.

However, the transition is not without significant risks that require proactive mitigation under the [Equality Act 2010](#). A primary concern is "proximity bias" or "flexibility stigma." The [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) warns that disabled workers—who may utilise remote options more frequently—risk becoming less visible to leadership, potentially being overlooked for promotions or high-profile projects. Furthermore, the modern trend toward "hot-desking" can create immediate physical barriers for those who require permanent, specialised equipment or a predictable routine.

To ensure hybrid working remains an inclusive practice, organisations must address the logistics of equipment duplication. The [UK Government's Access to Work](#) scheme can be a vital resource here, providing grants for specialist technology in both home and office settings. To prevent social exclusion, the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) recommends "Digital First" communication protocols to ensure those joining remotely have an equal voice. When supported by formal mechanisms like a workplace [Reasonable Adjustments Passport](#), hybrid working can move beyond a "temporary fix" to become a sustainable, equitable pillar of the Scottish labour market.

Race

Table 7.1 shows the minority ethnic background of staff within the organisation for the period from 2021 to 2024.

Table 7.1: Race

Ethnicity	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %
African, Scottish African or British African	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	< 5	< 0.46%	< 5	< 0.47%
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	24	2.42%	25	2.41%	28	2.57%	30	2.81%
Caribbean or Black	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	< 5	< 0.46%	< 5	< 0.47%
Mixed or multiple ethnic group	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	< 5	< 0.46%	< 5	< 0.47%
Not specified	101	10.17%	122	11.78%	116	10.66%	97	9.10%
Other ethnic group	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	< 5	< 0.46%	< 5	< 0.47%
Prefer not to say	34	3.42%	30	2.90%	34	3.13%	26	2.44%
White	825	83.08%	849	81.95%	896	82.35%	897	84.15%

Over the period between 2021 and 2024 there has been an increase of 1.00% in staff declaring they are from a minority ethnic background. In 2023 over 3.50% of staff have declared they were from a minority ethnic background (3.86%) and 2024 saw the number of staff declaring they are from a minority ethnic background increasing to 4.32%.

Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25

Equalities: [SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25](#)

[Health and mental health statistics - Institute of Race Relations \(irr.org.uk\)](#) states:

'[Government statistics](#) show that Black / African / Caribbean / Black British people in particular have higher rates of mental illness and are therefore more likely to encounter mental health services. The 2017 [Race Disparity Audit](#) found that Black women are the group most likely to have experienced a common mental disorder such as anxiety or depression and that Black men are the group most likely to have experienced a psychotic disorder. [Statistics](#) show that Black men are ten times more likely than white men to experience such a disorder.'

<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/resources/blog/how-racial-inequities-make-hybrid-remote-flexible-work-even-more-appealing>

In 2021, a (US based) slack survey by Future Forum found that 97% of black workers want the future of the office to be remote or hybrid. It has been suggested that ethnic minorities may prefer remote work as they have fewer racial microaggressions to deal with and less discrimination when working from home.

<https://mentalhealth-uk.org/blog/how-does-hybrid-working-offer-a-more-inclusive-environment/>

discusses the advantages of having a hybrid working environment to attract people from different cultures.

The implementation of hybrid working models has a nuanced impact on Minority Ethnic (ME) workers in Scotland, offering a reprieve from certain workplace stressors while potentially introducing new barriers to institutional influence. Research by the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development \(CIPD\)](#) suggests that many ME employees report a higher preference for remote work to avoid "code-switching" and the daily experience of microaggressions or "office politics" that can be prevalent in physical workspaces. By allowing for a more controlled environment, hybrid models can improve daily wellbeing and psychological safety for staff who feel marginalised in traditional corporate cultures.

However, the [Scottish Government's Fair Work Action Plan](#) highlights that systemic barriers already contribute to a persistent ethnicity pay gap and lower rates of senior representation. A significant risk of hybrid working is the "proximity bias," where those physically present in the office—often members of the dominant cultural group—benefit from informal networking and "watercooler" opportunities that lead to promotion. If ME workers utilise remote options more frequently to avoid exclusionary office cultures, they may inadvertently be excluded from the informal mentorship and "social capital" necessary for career advancement, as noted in studies by the [Runnymede Trust](#).

To mitigate these risks and fulfil the [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#), Scottish organisations must ensure that performance management is based on objective outputs rather than "presenteeism." Organisations are encouraged to use Inclusive Leadership frameworks [Introducing our new values framework](#) to ensure that remote working ME staff are intentionally included in high-stakes projects and networking circles. Furthermore, as outlined by [Close the Gap](#), data collection on who is choosing to work from home—and their subsequent career trajectories—is essential to ensuring that hybrid working does not worsen existing ethnic disparities in the Scottish labour market.

Religion or Belief	Table 8.1 shows the religion, belief or non-belief status of staff within the organisation for the period from 2021 to 2024.							
	Table 8.1: Religion or belief							
	Religion or belief	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)
	Another religion or body	6	0.60%	6	0.58%	9	0.83%	6
	Buddhist	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	<= 5	<= 0.46%	<= 5
	Church of Scotland	127	12.79%	125	12.07%	119	10.94%	112
	Hindu	7	0.70%	8	0.77%	11	1.01%	13
	Jewish	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	<= 5	<= 0.46%	–
	Muslim	10	1.01%	11	1.06%	10	0.92%	11
	None	462	46.53%	489	47.20%	540	49.63%	544
	Not specified	102	10.27%	123	11.87%	117	10.75%	102
	Other Christian	44	4.43%	44	4.25%	45	4.14%	47
	Pagan	–	–	–	–	–	0.00%	<= 5
	Prefer not to say	103	10.37%	103	9.94%	104	9.56%	97
	Roman Catholic	129	12.99%	123	11.87%	127	11.67%	128
	Sikh	< 5	< 0.50%	< 5	< 0.48%	–	0.00%	–
Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25								
Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25								
https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1751688/understanding-benefits-flexible-working								
Discusses potential benefits to people with religion or beliefs and flexibility in working arrangements, specifically to take religious holidays, adhere to religious requirements like fasting and prayers.								
The transition to hybrid working models has generally had a positive impact on religious inclusion in the Scottish workplace, particularly regarding the "duty to accommodate" under the Equality Act 2010 . For many staff, the home environment provides								

	a level of privacy and facility for prayer and reflection that is often lacking in public or open-plan offices. According to Interfaith Scotland, the flexibility to adjust start and finish times is vital for those observing daily religious rituals, such as the five daily prayers in Islam or the early Friday departure required for Shabbat in Judaism. During significant religious periods like Ramadan, hybrid working is a key tool for wellbeing. The CIPD notes that working from home allows employees to better manage their energy levels while fasting and facilitates breaking the fast with family, which reduces the stress of a long evening commute. Furthermore, the shift away from a "9-5, Monday to Friday" norm supports the use of flexible public holidays, where staff may choose to work on traditional UK bank holidays in exchange for time off during Eid, Diwali, or Vaisakhi. However, a risk identified in many Scottish public sector assessments, such as those by Audit Scotland, is the potential loss of "religious literacy" among teams. When staff are physically distant, the informal opportunities to learn about a colleague's faith or traditions can diminish. This can lead to the accidental scheduling of "all-staff" events or mandatory office days during major religious festivals. To mitigate this, the Scottish Government's Fair Work guidance encourages the use of multi-faith calendars and the maintenance of "Quiet Rooms" in physical offices to ensure that on-site days remain inclusive for practitioners of all beliefs.																																												
Sex	Table 9.1 shows the distribution of staff within the organisation by sex for the period from 2021 to 2024. The split between females and males within the organisation has remained consistent over the period from 2021 to 2024, with less than a 1.00% change. Table 9.1: Sex <table><tr><th>Sex</th><th>2021 (number)</th><th>2021 %</th><th>2022 (number)</th><th>2022 %</th><th>2023 (number)</th><th>2023 %</th><th>2024 (number)</th><th>2024 %</th><th>Difference (number)</th><th>Difference %</th></tr><tr><td>Female</td><td>618</td><td>62.24%</td><td>644</td><td>62.16%</td><td>679</td><td>62.41%</td><td>664</td><td>62.29%</td><td>46</td><td>0.05%</td></tr><tr><td>Male</td><td>375</td><td>37.76%</td><td>392</td><td>37.84%</td><td>409</td><td>37.59%</td><td>402</td><td>37.71%</td><td>27</td><td>-0.05%</td></tr><tr><td>SQA</td><td>993</td><td>100%</td><td>1036</td><td>100%</td><td>1088</td><td>100%</td><td>1066</td><td>100%</td><td>73</td><td>0.00%</td></tr></table> Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25 Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25 Nationally, Carers UK state:We're here to make life better for carers - Carers UK 1 in 4 women aged 50-64 have caring responsibilities, compared to 1 in 6 men. Women have a 50:50 chance of providing care by the time they are 59; compared with men who have the same chance by the time they are 75 years old. Women are more likely to be sandwich carers (combining eldercare and childcare) are also more likely to give up work in order to care.	Sex	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %	Difference (number)	Difference %	Female	618	62.24%	644	62.16%	679	62.41%	664	62.29%	46	0.05%	Male	375	37.76%	392	37.84%	409	37.59%	402	37.71%	27	-0.05%	SQA	993	100%	1036	100%	1088	100%	1066	100%	73	0.00%
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www.equalityevidence.scot reports 59% of all carers in Scotland are women.

[Research shows men are more lonely than women - Voluntary Action Sheffield \(vas.org.uk\)](http://vas.org.uk)

[Loneliness Annual Report January 2021 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

The above sources highlight that gender may not be a consistent factor in loneliness, we conclude that women may be more open about this feeling than men. Younger and older age (traditionally not working age groups) may be an easier to quantify factor. [Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? - Office for National Statistics](#)

In 2020, [research](#) by Springer indicated that flexible forms of work can reinforce gender stereotypes, allowing couples to perform typical gender roles. For example, when women work flexibly, they tend to use that flexibility to do domestic labour or childcare.

This reinforces the traditional stereotype of women in a caring role.

<https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1804247/flexible-working-challenges-two-tier-workforce>

Discusses the fact that women are 26% more likely to ask for flexible working arrangements than men. [ONS, 2020 shows rise in domestic abuse when working from home during pandemic in society and less opportunities for colleagues to potentially help \(camera off etc\).](#)

[Unison](#) People going through the Menopause may benefit from a Hybrid approach, allowing flexibility in working while experiencing menopausal symptoms.

The CIPD, in their publication '[Menopause Workplace Experiences](#)' note that most working women, aged 40 to 60, have experienced symptoms related to menopause transition and over half have been unable to go into work at some point due to menopause symptoms. This article states that flexibility around working location and working from home can have a significant impact on women going through the menopause.

Hybrid working has profound implications for sex equality, offering a mechanism to balance professional and domestic spheres while simultaneously risking the "domestication" of women's work. Research by [Close the Gap Scotland](#) indicates that women are more likely to prioritise flexibility to manage childcare and eldercare. While this supports labour market participation, the [Institute for Fiscal Studies \(IFS\)](#) warns of a "double burden," where women working from home often perform more housework and childcare simultaneously compared to men in the same position.

	A significant risk in the Scottish public and private sectors is the reinforcement of traditional sex roles. If women utilise hybrid working to manage domestic life while men return to the office at higher rates, a "gendered visibility gap" emerges. The University of Glasgow’s research on Fair Work suggests that this can negatively affect women’s career progression, as senior leadership—often still male-dominated—may favour those with higher "office presence" for promotion and mentorship. However, when implemented through a Fair Work First lens, hybrid working can be a powerful tool for closing the gender pay gap. It allows women to remain in full-time roles rather than dropping to part-time, preserving their earning potential. Furthermore, as noted by Engender Scotland, if men also utilise hybrid options to increase their contribution to domestic life, it can lead to a more equitable distribution of unpaid labour across both sexes.																																			
Sexual Orientation	Table 10.1 shows the composition of staff sexual orientation for 2023 and 2024. Table 10.1: Sexual orientation <table><tr><th>Sexual Orientation</th><th>2023 (number)</th><th>2023 %</th><th>2024 (number)</th><th>2024 %</th></tr><tr><td>Bisexual</td><td>24</td><td>2.21%</td><td>28</td><td>2.63%</td></tr><tr><td>Gay or lesbian</td><td>39</td><td>3.58%</td><td>36</td><td>3.38%</td></tr><tr><td>Heterosexual / straight</td><td>717</td><td>65.90%</td><td>729</td><td>68.39%</td></tr><tr><td>Not specified</td><td>207</td><td>19.03%</td><td>181</td><td>16.98%</td></tr><tr><td>Other sexual orientation</td><td>9</td><td>0.83%</td><td>10</td><td>0.94%</td></tr><tr><td>Prefer not to say</td><td>92</td><td>8.46%</td><td>82</td><td>7.69%</td></tr></table> Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25 Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25 Evidence from the Health Needs Assessment of LGBT+ People in Scotland (ScotPHN/Public Health Scotland/Health needs assessment of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and non-binary people) reveals profound health inequalities across all measures of wellbeing. The assessment found that over half (54%) of LGBTQ+ respondents in Scotland reported mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, or stress—a figure that rises significantly to 75% for trans masculine and 72% for non-binary individuals. Furthermore, 31% of LGBTQ+ people in Scotland reported having attempted to end their life at some point, with nearly half of trans masculine and non-binary respondents reporting a previous suicide attempt Probable Suicides, 2024 - National Records of Scotland (NRS). These findings are further compounded by LGBT Youth Scotland’s 2024 reports/Life in Scotland for LGBT Young People in 2022 - LGBT Youth Scotland, which highlight that 72% of trans young people in Scotland view transphobia as a major problem in their daily lives. This intersection of high mental distress and systemic discrimination necessitates the targeted inclusive actions outlined in this assessment.	Sexual Orientation	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %	Bisexual	24	2.21%	28	2.63%	Gay or lesbian	39	3.58%	36	3.38%	Heterosexual / straight	717	65.90%	729	68.39%	Not specified	207	19.03%	181	16.98%	Other sexual orientation	9	0.83%	10	0.94%	Prefer not to say	92	8.46%	82	7.69%
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	About LGBTIQ+ mental health - Mind makes the link that, although anyone can experience a mental health problem, those who identify as LGBTIQ+ are more likely to develop problems like: low self-esteem depression anxiety, including social anxiety eating problems misusing drugs and alcohol self-harm suicidal feelings other mental health problems. People Management discusses research showing how LGBTIQ+ employees may find hybrid/home working a positive or negative experience depending on their home circumstances and subsequent support from workplace. https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1746192/how-to-support-lgbt-employees-during-covid For LGBTIQ+ employees in Scotland, hybrid working offers a complex trade-off between increased personal safety and potential professional isolation. Research by Stonewall Scotland highlights that many LGBTIQ+ workers still experience "code-switching"—altering their language, behaviour, or appearance to fit into heteronormative office cultures. For these individuals, working from home provides a higher degree of psychological safety and reduces the daily emotional labour of navigating microaggressions or unwanted questioning about their personal lives. However, the "office" often serves as a critical site for community building and visibility. The TUC (Trades Union Congress) has noted that remote-heavy models can lead to the "digital erasure" of LGBTIQ+ identities. Without the informal social interactions of a physical workspace, LGBTIQ+ staff—particularly those who are not yet out to all colleagues—may find it harder to find mentors or connect with peer support networks and staff "Pride" groups. This lack of visibility can lead to a sense of professional alienation and may stall career progression if networking opportunities become restricted to "in-group" office circles. To align with Fair Work First principles, Scottish employers must ensure that "office days" are intentionally inclusive and that digital spaces are actively moderated to prevent exclusionary behaviour. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) emphasises that "banter" in digital chats can be just as exclusionary as in-person comments. Therefore, robust digital inclusion policies and the promotion of virtual LGBTIQ+ networks are essential to ensure that hybrid working does not inadvertently push LGBTIQ+ staff back into the "closet" of a private home office.
Gender Reassignment (Gender identity and transgender)	Staff provide data on both gender reassignment and gender identity. Due to the low number of staff reporting as transgender or describing their gender identity as 'other,' we are unable to publish further data in relation to gender reassignment or gender identity. This data is, however, monitored internally. Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25 Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25

	Gender transition Health Information Bupa UK and Gender and Mental Health Support and Advice YoungMinds offer mental health guidance to people undergoing or thinking about gender reassignment, making a clear link to the risk of poorer mental health. The shift to hybrid working has been identified by many Scottish public bodies, including Revenue Scotland, as a predominantly positive development for trans and non-binary staff. A primary benefit is the increased autonomy over physical presentation. For individuals in the early stages of social transition, working from home provides a "safe harbour" to explore gender expression without the immediate pressure of navigating office-based reactions or outdated dress codes. Furthermore, hybrid models make it significantly easier to attend gender-affirming healthcare appointments—which in Scotland often involve long wait times and travel to specialist clinics—without the need for full days of absence. However, research from LGBT Health and Wellbeing Scotland indicates that remote working can also lead to "digital isolation." Trans employees often rely on visible allyship and inclusive office cultures to feel secure; when work moves to a digital-only format, there is a risk that inclusive behaviours (such as the correct use of pronouns) become less consistent. Additionally, NHS Highland's EQIA notes that as staff return to offices for "hub days," the availability of gender neutral facilities becomes a critical point of inclusion. A lack of these facilities can make the mandatory "office days" of a hybrid model a source of significant anxiety. To meet the Fair Work First criteria, Scottish employers are encouraged to implement Gender Identity Policies that specifically address hybrid contexts. This includes ensuring that HR systems allow for non-binary gender markers and that managers are trained to support "Transitioning at Work" protocols that bridge both the home and office environments.																																													
Marriage/Civil Partnership	The percentage of staff declaring they are married or in a civil partnership was 40.90% in 2023 and 44.75% in 2024. The percentage of staff declaring they are married or in a civil partnership has remained consistent over the last four years. Table 5.1 shows the marriage and civil partnership status of staff within the organisation for the period from 2021 to 2024. Table 5.1: Relationship status <table><tr><th>Relationship status</th><th>2021 (number)</th><th>2021 %</th><th>2022 (number)</th><th>2022 %</th><th>2023 (number)</th><th>2023 %</th><th>2024 (number)</th><th>2024 %</th></tr><tr><td>No</td><td>377</td><td>37.97%</td><td>396</td><td>38.22%</td><td>464</td><td>42.65%</td><td>433</td><td>40.62%</td></tr><tr><td>Not specified</td><td>102</td><td>10.27%</td><td>127</td><td>12.26%</td><td>118</td><td>10.85%</td><td>102</td><td>9.57%</td></tr><tr><td>Prefer not to say</td><td>55</td><td>5.54%</td><td>59</td><td>5.69%</td><td>61</td><td>5.61%</td><td>54</td><td>5.07%</td></tr><tr><td>Yes</td><td>459</td><td>46.22%</td><td>454</td><td>43.82%</td><td>445</td><td>40.90%</td><td>477</td><td>44.75%</td></tr></table> Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25	Relationship status	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %	No	377	37.97%	396	38.22%	464	42.65%	433	40.62%	Not specified	102	10.27%	127	12.26%	118	10.85%	102	9.57%	Prefer not to say	55	5.54%	59	5.69%	61	5.61%	54	5.07%	Yes	459	46.22%	454	43.82%	445	40.90%	477	44.75%
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[Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25](#)

We have no evidence in relation to Qualifications Scotland employees or from wider research that there is a significant impact, positive or negative, for this group in terms of this policy.

The transition to hybrid working has largely been viewed as a positive or "neutral" impact for this group in Scotland. The primary benefit lies in the **household stability** afforded by flexible arrangements. According to the [Scottish Government's Fair Work guidance](#), hybrid working allows couples to better synchronise their domestic lives, particularly when both partners are balancing career aspirations with the management of a shared household. This "flexibility capital" can reduce the strain on relationships that was historically caused by long, clashing commutes and rigid office hours.

However, a specific risk often highlighted in legal and HR contexts, such as by [Acas \(Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service\)](#), is the potential for **"linked discrimination."** This occurs if an employer makes assumptions about a married person's availability based on their spouse's career—for example, assuming a married woman will work from home more often to support her husband's office-based role. In a hybrid environment, it is vital that managers treat employees as individuals, ensuring that work from home privileges or office-day requirements are not influenced by an employee's marital status.

Furthermore, the [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) notes that civil partners must be treated exactly the same as married couples regarding employment benefits and flexible working policies. Hybrid working policies in Scotland should be explicitly checked to ensure that "emergency leave" or "carer's flexibility" applies equally to all legally recognised partnerships, preventing any disparate treatment in the remote working era.

Pregnancy / Maternity

Table 6.1 details the number of staff who have taken maternity leave, whether they are still on maternity leave (due to return to work), have returned to work following maternity, resigned following maternity leave, or their fixed-term contract ended (contract ended as planned).

Table 6.1: Pregnancy and maternity

Pregnancy and maternity	2021 (number)	2021 %	2022 (number)	2022 %	2023 (number)	2023 %	2024 (number)	2024 %
Contract ended as planned	1	3.33%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
Due to return to work	0	0.00%	11	40.00%	5	27.78%	12	48.00%
Resigned	0	0.00%	1	4.00%	1	5.56%	0	0.00%
Returned to work	29	96.67%	14	56.00%	12	66.67%	13	52.00%
Total	30	100%	26	100%	18	100%	25	100%

Source: SQA Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2023-25

[Equalities: SQA workforce monitoring report 2023-25](#)

[Guardian, linked to CIPD research](#)

Shows that increased flexibility could help improve work/life balance for those with caring responsibilities, however colleagues returning from maternity leave to the organisation may find it harder to settle back into work when working remotely.

Current NHS Scotland and RCOG (2025/26) guidance highlights that pregnant individuals remain at a higher risk of severe illness from respiratory infections, including COVID-19 and Influenza. To mitigate these risks, the HSE and Public Health Scotland advise that employers must undertake a specific New and Expectant Mothers (NEM) Risk Assessment/ [Protecting pregnant workers and new mothers - HSE](#). This includes considering flexible working arrangements or working from home where appropriate to limit exposure to infectious diseases, particularly during the third trimester when the risk of maternal and foetal complications is highest.

Hybrid working is frequently cited as a major benefit for those during the pregnancy and maternity cycle. According to [Public Health Scotland](#), the ability to work from home allows pregnant employees to manage common symptoms—such as morning sickness and fatigue—in a comfortable, private environment. Furthermore, it facilitates attendance at antenatal appointments without the added stress of a long commute, supporting better health outcomes. This flexibility aligns with the [Scottish Government's Fair Work First](#) objective of supporting workers' health and wellbeing.

However, the "return to work" phase presents significant risks. Research by [Maternity Action](#) suggests that mothers returning from maternity leave often face a "maternity penalty," where they are perceived as less committed to their roles. In a hybrid environment, this can be exacerbated if a returning mother chooses to work from home more frequently to manage childcare or breastfeeding. Without intentional "touchpoints," these employees risk becoming digitally isolated and missing out on the informal networking that occurs in the office, which is vital for regaining career momentum.

To mitigate these risks, the [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#) recommends that hybrid policies include specific provisions for "Keeping in Touch" (KIT) days that can be done remotely or in-person. Furthermore, for those breastfeeding upon their return to the office, [Healthy Working Lives Scotland](#) emphasises that physical office spaces must still provide private, sanitary facilities, even if the office is move toward a "hot-desking" or "hub" model.

Care experience (where relevant)	Qualifications Scotland does not currently collect Care Experience data. In Scotland, Care Experience is increasingly recognised as a "tenth protected characteristic" by many public bodies and local authorities. For an EQIA, this section focuses on how hybrid working can help overcome the unique systemic barriers faced by those who have spent time in residential, foster, or kinship care. For care experienced workers in Scotland, hybrid working can provide a vital layer of socio-economic stability and psychological safety. Research by The Who Cares? Scotland highlights that care experienced individuals often lack the "bank of mum and dad" or stable housing safety nets that their peers enjoy. Hybrid working reduces the high cost of commuting and allows for more flexible living arrangements, which is essential for those who may be navigating the transition from care to independent living or dealing with precarious housing situations. Furthermore, many care experienced people have navigated traumatic pasts where traditional, rigid authority structures—like a formal 9-5 office—can feel restrictive or triggering. The autonomy of a hybrid model aligns with the Scottish Government's "The Promise", which advocates for a "scaffold of support" rather than a "system of control." By allowing workers to curate their own environment, hybrid models can reduce workplace anxiety and improve long-term retention for a demographic that is statistically more likely to face early-career instability. However, the CEPS (Care Experienced People Scotland) notes a risk regarding social capital. Care experienced individuals may not have the existing professional networks that others do. If a hybrid policy reduces "office time," it may inadvertently limit the opportunities for informal "on-the-job" learning and networking. Without intentional mentorship, care experienced staff might miss out on the "unwritten rules" of the workplace, which are more easily absorbed through face-to-face interaction.
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Impact and Opportunities for Action

The impact that a policy or practice has on an equality group may be different and this requires to be recorded. The impact may not always be negative. Actions are taken to address any differential impact, and include actions to mitigate against any negative impact, to advance equality and to foster good relations between groups.

Each section contains questions for each equality group. These questions are here to support consideration; however, you can provide further detail. Focus initially on the equality groups that would be affected by this policy. If you do not consider that certain equality groups would be affected by this policy, you may leave these sections.

Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Age	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Qualifications Scotland considers that this guidance document, on balance, will have a perceived positive impact on employees of all ages as the guidance document aims to ensure and maintain improvement in physical and mental wellbeing while also effectively maintain services. The hybrid working guidance provides a framework for working arrangements and some key considerations for both office and remote working in general. The hybrid working is open to employees of all ages with guidance on assessing roles for hybrid working. Hybrid working is based on the role itself not people or age. Hybrid working arrangements are spread across all age groups within Qualifications Scotland. ONS 2022 Opinions and Lifestyle survey shows 29% of employees aged 30-49 are more likely to benefit from working hybrid. Whereas HR Review (2023) reports that younger generations of employees, those under 20 reported lower levels of wellbeing than any other age group. There wellbeing was reported as being 9.7% lower than 21-30 age group and 10% lower than 31-40 and 41-50 age group. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/ishybridworkinghere tostay/2022-05-23 https://hrreview.co.uk/analysis/future-of-work-analysis/garry-goldman-is-hybrid-working-hindering-younger-employees/372396#:~:text=While%20attitudes%20to%20hybrid%20working,to%20any%20other%20age%20group.

	ONS state that younger workers aged 16-29 were less likely than those aged 30 or over to report experiencing fewer distractions 32% working hybrid, 56% between the age of 30 to 49 years and 60% aged 50-69 years reported fewer distractions and benefits from working from home. The positive impact of hybrid working is that it is shown to increase overall productivity with employees reporting fewer distractions. https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/isahybridworkinghertostay/2022-05-23 The guidance document is in place to improve the physical and mental wellbeing of all age ranges. Qualifications Scotland hybrid working also links in with Qualifications Scotland flexible working policy. Although hybrid working is based on specific roles rather than requests, Qualifications Scotland still offers flexibility to employees through the flexible working process. This guidance document is inclusive of absences in all ages, ensuring attendance management policy is applied equally. Risks of Discrimination – Direct and Indirect: Younger workers may be more likely to be living in shared accommodation or less likely to have suitable working space at home. This may result in a greater need to have the option to work at an office location. While we recognise that many older people are highly capable when it comes to using new technologies, some older employees may not be as comfortable. There are higher numbers of older workers with caring responsibilities and home-based working may help them achieve a better work/life balance with the need to travel to work removed. Younger Workers (16–24) • Indirect Discrimination Risk: A mandatory "work from home" policy or a lack of office space may disproportionately disadvantage younger staff. They are statistically more likely to live in shared or unsuitable accommodation (e.g., working from a bedroom), which can lead to poorer mental health and decreased productivity compared to older peers with dedicated home offices. • Professional Stagnation: Young workers rely on "organic" or "shoulder-to-shoulder" learning. A lack of face-to-face interaction can be seen as an indirect barrier to promotion and skill acquisition, potentially breaching the Fair Work First principle of "Opportunity."
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Older Workers (55+)

- Indirect Discrimination Risk (Digital Exclusion): While many are tech-savvy, a shift to purely digital support channels without adequate training can inadvertently exclude older staff. This is known as "Digital Ageism" and can lead to performance-related disadvantage.
- Direct Discrimination Risk (Assumptions): Managers must avoid the direct bias of assuming older workers *cannot* use new tools, or conversely, assuming they do not want career development because they are "winding down."
- Positive Impact (Caring Responsibilities): In Scotland, workers aged 50–64 are most likely to have [unpaid caring responsibilities](#). Hybrid working acts as a vital mitigation against "forced" early retirement.

The guidance does not list any Age-related adjustments or make reference to any Age-related adjustments.

We have recorded a **potentially negative impact** on younger and older employees, but this can, we feel, be **mitigated** through the guidance with a blend of home and office working being adopted and ensuring that many activities, are ideally held through face-to-face interactions and support channels are explicitly offered to all hybrid workers to help to mitigate adverse effects on morale / motivation as a result of long-term home working.

Advance equality of opportunity

While all Qualifications Scotland employees are entitled to use, access, and of course, be subject to the Hybrid working guidance, whether or not the guidance actually promotes / advances the 'same chance' to employees of all ages remains unclear. *Hybrid working guidance is based on the role not the individual.*

Advancing Equality of Opportunity (same chance) may sometimes require organisations to do slightly different things to meet the different needs of people. Qualifications Scotland's majority age profile is 35-59 which according to ONS is the age range which benefits most from hybrid working.

This guidance could help to advance equality of opportunity for employees who need to work from home on the grounds of their Age.

Positive equality related impact is recorded in this area.

	Foster good relations Fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share, or may not share, a protected characteristic. This guidance document is shown to improve employee physical and mental wellbeing. This guidance document does not explicitly reference <i>Age</i>. While working from home may help reduce any gaps between older and younger people because interactions are [‘invisible’], it may also lead to more prejudice due to the lack of workplace interactions and friendships which can break down misconceptions. If an individual in a team works from home permanently, there is often less opportunity for workplace interactions with different age groups, risks of isolation by tech generation (typically younger) as they stick to their own networks and have little opportunity to socialise across Qualifications Scotland’s workforce. This is mitigated within the guidance by ensuring there are office-based activities with face-to-face interactions throughout the working year. For these reasons, a positive equality related impact is recorded in this area.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Disability	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Qualifications Scotland considers that this guidance will, on balance, have an overall perceived positive impact on employees who declare a Disability as the guidance document is designed to increase flexibility around where employees work in line with Fair Work aspirations and the Public Sector Duties of the Equality Act 2010. The guidance document is designed to eliminate discrimination of the grounds of a protected characteristic. In 2024 we know that 10% of SQA employees have declared a disability. The main aim is to ensure inclusion and equality when assessing roles and to take into consideration personal circumstances to create a level playing field regardless of working remotely or in the workplace.

Qualifications Scotland does require employees to complete workstation assessments to ensure, where required, employees have access to the correct equipment for their needs. <https://sqanow.sharepoint.com/sites/C196800159> Furthermore colleagues who require additional support due to their disability have access to wellbeing support to assist with any reasonable adjustments related to their disability.

Research conducted during the pandemic both by the Scottish Government and other organisations, has highlighted that for a large proportion of employees with disabilities, the shift to home working during the pandemic has been 'life-changing' (Hybrid Working Survey, Schur et al, 2020)

Disability Rights UK reported that a survey was conducted on 400 disabled workers which showed that 70% of them said if their employer did not allow them to work remotely it would have a negative impact on their physical or mental health. It went on to say that 85% of disabled workers felt work productive working from home. <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/future-remote-and-hybrid-working-listening-voices-disabled-workers-dr-calum-carson>

It is important to note that although all roles are not hybrid roles, employees have access to and are able to request flexible working requests to support their personal circumstances which include working hours, location, and general arrangements.

We conclude that home working may better support the needs of many disabled people. Conversely, with no workplace interactions disabled people are more likely to experience exacerbation of already poor mental health due to loneliness and reduced mental wellbeing and restrictions in the ability to undertake physical activity.

There may be an impact on employees with certain neuro-diverse conditions who may require certain adjustments to working environments or practices. Research carried out during the pandemic has highlighted that some of the potential risks of hybrid working to those with disabilities may be mitigated by forward planning. For example, Das et al. (2021) reported on the hybrid working experiences of neurodivergent individuals with conditions including Autism Spectrum Disorders and ADHD, a group of individuals who can struggle with some aspects of social interaction and communication, can wither struggle with planning or else require highly specific plans, and who can also struggle with sudden changes in routine. These challenges can be mitigated by managers being proactive, using different types of communication,

	ensuring accessibility, providing materials in advance amongst other methods. This proactive approach to risks benefits the wider population of employees with disabilities and potentially the full workforce. There may also be positive impacts in terms of providing the flexibility to work in an environment that is the best match in terms of meeting both work requirements, and those that relate to the specific needs of each individual disability, e.g. reduce the impact of distractions typical in an open-plan office. We therefore conclude a Potential positive impact for Disabled employees.
	Advance equality of opportunity While all Qualifications Scotland employees are entitled to use, access, and of course, be subject to hybrid working, whether or not the guidance actually promotes / advances the 'same chance' to employees with disabilities remains unclear. This is due to a lack of data of hybrid working against employees with a disability. However, this is mitigated by the equalities section and wellbeing section within the guidance document. Advancing Equality of Opportunity (same chance) may sometimes require organisations to do slightly different things to meet the different needs of people. Hybrid home and office working may be considered as a positive reasonable adjustment to support an employee who has a disability. Home working and Qualifications Scotland's other working arrangement policies (e.g. <i>Flexible Working</i> and <i>Flexitime</i>) should overall be considered as a supportive option for disabled people. However, there is an opportunity by using innovation and careful management practices to offer people with disabilities a sustainable and supportive way to work with Qualifications Scotland that accommodate their needs. Training has been provided to line managers and all employees as part of the hybrid working guidance to ensure employees with disabilities are signposted and can receive the correct support which will enhance their working experience. Potential positive equality related impact is recorded in this area.

	Foster good relations Fostering good relations involves tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people who share, or may not share, a protected characteristic. This guidance document does not explicitly reference Disability. It does not, for example, provide any guidance to managers in respect of considering disability related adjustments. While working from home may help reduce the gap between disabled and non-disabled people because interactions are ['invisible'], it may also lead to more prejudice due to the lack of workplace interactions and friendships which can break down misconceptions. If working from home on an ongoing or constant basis there are less opportunities for workplace interactions against different groups, risks of isolation by tech generation (typically younger) as people may stick to their own networks and have little opportunity to socialise across Qualifications Scotland's workforce. For these reasons, a neutral equality related impact is recorded in this area.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Race	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Qualifications Scotland considers that on balance, this guidance document will have an overall perceived positive impact on employees of all <i>Ethnicities, Races and Nationalities</i> as the guidance aims to establish flexibility over where employees work. Qualifications Scotland do not capture or analyse hybrid working by Race/ Ethnicity or Nationality of its employees. It is not therefore possible, to fully establish if any disproportionate trends or risks of discrimination exist within the Qualifications Scotland in the use or application of this guidance.

	People Management reported that 32% of ethnic minority workers have left or considered leaving a job due to lack of flexibility compared to just 21% of white workers. https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1752377/ethnic-minority-workers-likely-quit-flexibility-white-counterparts-research-finds People from some ethnic groups are more likely to live in a house of multiple occupancy or overcrowded accommodation making home working much more difficult. This is particularly relevant where Qualifications Scotland state that a base at Qualifications Scotland premises is either unnecessary or where there are insufficient resources to offer permanent office accommodation for a role. https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/housing/housing-conditions/overcrowded-households/latest Permanently working from home may lead to greater isolation in communities, limited societal integration and a higher risk to this equality groups of poor mental health. We record a potentially negative impact on this equality group, which is mitigated through Hybrid working framework offering a blend of office and home working and offering the opportunity to work from office location all of their time.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	While all Qualifications Scotland employees are entitled to use, access and be subject to the hybrid working, the guidance does not necessarily promote / advance the 'same chance' to employees from different ethnicities and nationalities. We record a neutral impact.
	Foster good relations
	Working from home for long periods may present less opportunities for workplace interactions against different groups of people which would not assist in fostering good relations. The guidance provides the opportunity for ethnic minority workers to have more flexibility, and evidence would indicate are more likely to remain at Qualifications Scotland than leave because of this. In most roles there is the opportunity to work from the office or home location. We record a potentially positive impact on this equality group.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty

Religion or Belief	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	We conclude there is no evidence to suggest this guidance document may adversely impact on people on the grounds of their Religion or Philosophical Beliefs. Qualifications Scotland's ACE Network highlights different religious festivals throughout the year. It is also Qualifications Scotland's policy to offer quiet areas for prayer or personal reflection and meal options to reflect particular diets. Neutral Equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	While all Qualifications Scotland employees are entitled to use, access and be subjected to hybrid working, the guidance document does not necessarily promote / advance the 'same chance' to employees from different religious/belief groups. Hybrid working could benefit anyone with religious and/or other beliefs, providing more flexible arrangements for praying or other religious or belief practices and practices. Positive related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
	Foster good relations
Protected Characteristic	We have recorded a mixed impact on fostering good relations. While the policy is positive in advancing equality by providing flexibility for religious practice, it has a potentially neutral or negative impact on inter-faith bonding due to reduced informal contact. This is mitigated by promoting our digital multi-faith calendar and through in office presence. The guidance is likely to have a mixed impact on the promotion of good relations between people of different religions / belief systems.
	General Equality Duty

Sex	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	WORK MIND reports that in 2019 56.5% of UK women worked full-time, this has since risen to 58.7% in 2023 due to sectors embracing hybrid working. https://workinmind.org/2023/09/19/hybrid-working-spurs-growth-women-uk-study/. HR Magazine confirms those statistics by stating that 61% of women appear to be the biggest beneficiaries of hybrid working compared to only 51% of men surveyed. This may be due to culture of women who are typically responsible for caring responsibilities of children or adults. https://www.hrmagazine.co.uk/content/news/women-more-comfortable-at-work-in-hybrid-working-era/ More recent data indicates that the shift toward hybrid models remains a primary driver for women's participation in the full-time labour market. According to the House of Commons Library (2025), there were 10.42 million women working full-time in the UK by late 2024—an increase of nearly 200,000 in a single year. This growth is widely attributed to sectors embracing hybrid flexibility, which has allowed more women to transition from part-time to full-time roles while managing domestic commitments. A 2024 report by the International Workplace Group (IWG) found that 66% of women believe hybrid work has "levelled the playing field," with 53% stating it has enabled them to apply for promotions or more senior roles. This sentiment is particularly strong among women from minority backgrounds, 73% of whom report that hybrid working has opened professional opportunities that were previously inaccessible. However, the "return-to-office" mandates of 2024/25 have introduced new risks. Deloitte's 2024 'Women at Work' report found that nearly half (47%) of UK women reported higher stress levels than the previous year, often due to the removal of flexible policies. The report also highlights a persistent "double burden": among women living with a partner, 44% still bear the primary responsibility for childcare and 51% for adult care, making hybrid flexibility not just a preference, but a structural necessity for their continued employment. The impact of hybrid working on the duty to eliminate sex-based discrimination is mixed. While the model significantly reduces the risk of physical harassment and supports the retention of women with caring responsibilities, it introduces a new frontier of technology-facilitated harassment. Furthermore, without robust 'output-based' management, the model risks creating a proximity bias that could lead to indirect discrimination against women.

	Qualifications Scotland does proactively monitor digital conduct and ensures that career progression remains untethered from physical office presence. As there are proportionality more women than men in Qualifications Scotland, there is a risk that on balance, there are more women who work hybrid than men. It can also be said that as Qualifications Scotland has more women than men there could be more chance of the majority of Qualifications Scotland workforce having caring responsibilities in addition to their role. There is currently no profiling data to allow the identification or elimination of potential Sex Discrimination when assessing roles as the Sex of employees is not recorded in respect of: ▪ Office – Fixed location and fixed hours ▪ Hybrid – Variable location and fixed hours Qualifications Scotland mitigate this by making the decision based on the role not the individual. Qualifications Scotland provide a consistent approach to assessing suitability for hybrid working. This ensures equal opportunities and eliminate any potential discrimination.
	Advance equality of opportunity While all Qualifications Scotland employees are entitled to use, access and be subjected to hybrid working, the guidance document does not necessarily promote / advance the 'same chance' to employees of each sex. In one respect, women are more likely to be balancing part-time, caring and /or schooling and if working from home for sustained periods, can have a negative impact on wellbeing. Hybrid working also potentially reduces the opportunities for networking and potentially career progression. For employees experiencing domestic abuse, the transition to hybrid working has permanently altered the "safe haven" of the workplace. While earlier research focused on lockdown violence (Piquero et al., 2021), Sharon's Policy (2025)—the UK's latest workplace guidance co-created with Refuge and the NSPCC—highlights that domestic abuse "does not stay at home." For those in hybrid roles, the reduction in office time can dramatically curtail "escape routes" and safe windows of time away from an abuser. Furthermore, the Domestic Abuse Alliance (2025) warns of a surge in technology-

	facilitated abuse, where abusers use the remote work environment to monitor emails, GPS track company devices, or utilise AI-driven tools like deepfakes to impersonate or discredit the victim professionally. In Scotland, the Scottish Government Evidence Update (2024) notes that while hybrid working improves overall wellbeing for many, the "narrowing" of social networks is a significant risk. If an employee is predominantly at home, the "early warning signs" of abuse—such as subtle changes in behaviour, unexplained absences, or fearful reactions during video calls—are harder for managers and colleagues to detect. The impact of hybrid working on loneliness has become a key metric in the UK Government's Community Life Survey (2024/25). While overall loneliness levels have slightly decreased since the pandemic, 9% of adults still report "high levels" of chronic indirect loneliness. The British Red Cross (2024) finds a stark "connection gap": while 84% of on-site workers feel close to their colleagues, this drops to only 44% among home-based workers. This isolation is not gender neutral. The Deloitte Women at Work Report (2024) highlights that women are more likely to experience "digital exclusion" in hybrid settings, feeling less connected to senior leadership. Conversely, Gallup (2025) research labels Gen Z as the "loneliest generation," with younger and fully remote workers twice as likely to feel socially isolated compared to their baby boomer counterparts, potentially stalling the "social scaffolding" necessary for career growth. Alternatively, flexibility around hours of work and location can be a positive to opening up opportunities for both existing and new employees. Additionally, Qualifications Scotland employees are not prevented or discouraged from using the offices. Conclusion is mixed with both positive and negative impact being recorded for this equality group.
	Foster good relations

	Hybrid working has a positive impact on fostering good relations by challenging gendered norms around childcare and reducing exposure to exclusionary office cultures. It promotes an environment of mutual respect where performance is valued over 'presenteeism.' To ensure this remains a positive force, the organisation must actively monitor for 'proximity bias' to ensure that women who utilise hybrid working are not disadvantaged in professional networking or promotion opportunities.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Sexual Orientation	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Qualifications Scotland mitigates potential bias by ensuring hybrid working decisions are rooted in the requirements of the role, rather than individual characteristics. This objective approach provides a consistent framework across the organisation. However, the impact on LGBTQ+ staff remains nuanced, balancing a "safe haven" at home with the risk of professional and social isolation. While many employees find the office an inclusive space, Stonewall (2025) research reveals that nearly 40% of LGBTQ+ employees in the UK still feel the need to hide their identity at work. For these individuals, hybrid working can offer a "psychological reprieve" from the daily stress of "code-switching" or navigating heteronormative office cultures. Conversely, a purely remote model risks "digital erasure," where staff may feel less comfortable "coming out" in transactional video calls compared to organic in-person social interactions. There is a documented disparity in mental health outcomes. A 2025 systematic review highlights that LGBTQ+ workers are nearly twice as likely as heterosexual peers to report depression and anxiety, often driven by "minority stress." Hybrid working supports these employees by providing the flexibility to attend counselling or specialised healthcare without the added stress of office-based "presenteeism." However, the CIPD (2024/25) warns that without meaningful face-to-face contact, these workers are at higher risk of "connection gaps," with trans workers reporting significantly lower levels of workplace psychological safety (75%) compared to heterosexual colleagues (85%). For those living in unsupportive environments, the office remains a vital "safe space." The 2025 Skills and Employment Survey found that LGBTQ+ workers remain at the highest risk of workplace abuse but also face unique vulnerabilities at home. Prolonged home working can increase exposure to unsupportive family dynamics or domestic abuse. Qualifications

	Scotland 's hybrid guidance works in collaboration with safeguarding policies to ensure that "office days" are protected as an option for any staff member whose home environment is not a place of safety. Hybrid working has a mixed impact on the duty to eliminate discrimination for LGBTQ+ staff. It provides a significant 'safety benefit' by reducing daily exposure to office-based microaggressions. However, it risks moving harassment into 'hidden' digital spaces and can lead to indirect discrimination through proximity bias. To mitigate this Qualifications Scotland proactively monitors digital culture and ensure that LGBTQ+ visibility and support networks are as robust in the virtual environment as they are in the physical office.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Hybrid working serves as a strategic tool for this by allowing individuals to curate a professional environment that respects their identity and health needs. Hybrid working offers a unique buffer against the stressors of traditional office life by giving staff greater control over how they share their identity. A 2025 study found that a majority of LGBTQ+ professionals feel safer expressing their authentic selves from home than in a traditional office. The use of digital tools like pronoun markers in video profiles and email signatures has become standard in hybrid settings. This practice helps non-binary and trans staff avoid the repetitive stress of correcting colleagues in-person, which a high percentage of workers report increases their sense of belonging. Historically, LGBTQ+ staff—particularly those who are gender-diverse—have faced higher rates of career breaks or attrition due to hostile office environments. Hybrid working helps level the playing field by allowing LGBTQ+ staff to apply for senior roles without the need to relocate to specific urban hubs. Recent reports from 2025 indicate that over two-thirds of LGBTQ+ workers believe hybrid models reduce workplace biases that previously hindered their promotion. By enabling talent to stay in the workforce from any location, the organisation can retain diverse perspectives at more senior levels. For employees undergoing gender reassignment, hybrid working is an essential tool for managing the sensitive phases of transition. It allows for a more discreet and flexible way to manage recovery times from gender-affirming surgeries or to attend specialist appointments, which can involve significant travel. Recent research highlights that non-binary individuals with high job autonomy often develop the internal validation needed to navigate more challenging office environments during their required on-site days.

	The reduction of daily exposure to microaggressions in the office serves as a positive driver for workplace satisfaction. Digital profiles allow for consistent pronoun use, which removes a significant social barrier for gender-diverse staff. Flexibility in scheduling also directly supports healthcare access, facilitating medical transitions without the need for extended leave. While the "visibility gap" remains a potential risk for promotion, the overall impact of hybrid working is to provide a customisable environment that supports long-term retention and mental wellbeing. Positive related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
	Foster good relations
	Continue to work in collaboration with Qualifications Scotland equality and diversity team as well as Qualifications Scotland's Rainbow Network. Digital home or hybrid working could enable a more inclusive environment where all colleagues are treated equally with no labels across different channels. Working from home for long periods may present less opportunities for workplace interactions against different groups of people which would not assist in fostering good relations for employees generally. Hybrid working may however offer more flexibility to give employees the opportunity to access support needed. Hybrid working has a mixed positive impact on fostering good relations. It provides a platform for normalisation through digital inclusion tools and increases the reach of educational events. However, it risks creating a 'connection gap' where the informal interactions that build inter-group empathy are lost. To ensure this remains a Positive effect Qualifications Scotland encourages the social aspect of working in the office and ensures that digital spaces are actively managed as inclusive, respectful environments where LGBTQ+ visibility is encouraged, not erased. Mixed positive equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Gender Reassignment (Gender identity and transgender)	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 We recognise that Under Section 16 of the <i>Gender Recognition Act 2004</i>, (now superseded by the <i>Equality Act 2010</i>) employees who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing or have undergone Gender Reassignment are entitled to take time off work for reasons relating to their reassignment.

	We consider that the Qualifications Scotland hybrid working guidance alongside other Qualifications Scotland policies such as flexible working and gender identity and transitioning at work will, on balance, have a positive impact on any employee identifying as Transgender. Please also note, that such absence is also included and referenced in the Gender Identity and Transitioning at Work Policy (Under Review). There are evidenced increased levels of mental health problems for this equality group. The workplace is one of the most likely locations for discrimination and harassment to occur, although it is important to note there is no evidence of that specific risk in Qualifications Scotland. Generally, working from home could limit this risk. A comfortable and supportive home environment can also provide more privacy and security. We recognise that longer periods at home can mean greater abuse from unsupportive families or partners, contributing to increased stress or distress, and increased risk of abuse. A positive impact is recorded for this equality group with noted potential negative impacts resulting in advised action to mitigate domestic and social isolation by specifically detailing the need to have team events and appropriate meaningful face-to-face interaction where possible.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Transgender data is not disclosed or shared within this analysis due to the limited sample size and to ensure compliance with GDPR legislation to protect individuals' personal information. Qualifications Scotland's hybrid working guidance works in collaboration with other Qualifications Scotland policies such as Gender Identity and Transitioning at Work Policy (Under Review).
	Foster good relations
	There is no evidence to indicate that this guidance currently fosters good relations between people of different Gender Identities or who are LGBTQ+.

	Digital home or hybrid working could foster good relations creating a more inclusive environment where all colleagues are treated equally with no labels across different channels. As previously stated, working from home for long periods may present less opportunities for workplace interactions against different groups of people which would not assist in fostering good relations for employees generally. Hybrid working can offer more opportunity of flexibility for colleagues transitioning gender. Qualifications Scotland will continue to review and gather data on Gender Identity through our equality workforce monitoring report and equality mainstreaming report as well as our Rainbow Network. It should be noted that all colleagues from their first day of employment have the legal right to do a flexible working request which includes where they work. As such individuals from this group could make the request to work from home part of full-time. This would follow the Flexible Working process and would be considered as per the statutory reasons if it can be approved. Neutral Equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Marriage/Civil Partnership	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Hybrid working reduces the "dual burden" of maintaining a household and professional commitments. By normalising flexible locations, Qualifications Scotland mitigates the risk of indirect discrimination where traditional office hours might conflict with modern domestic legal protections afforded to married couples and civil partners.) without impacting work commitments. From our evidence we conclude that there is a positive advantage to individuals who are married or civil partners within Qualifications Scotland. Positive impact recorded.

	Advance equality of opportunity
	Hybrid working provides increased flexibility to manage a shared household. While often linked to caring, the legal protection here ensures that those in a marriage/civil partnership are not treated less favourably than single colleagues. Qualifications Scotland's policy ensures that domestic status is not a barrier to career progression, as the location-neutral approach supports diverse family structures across Scotland. Positive impact recorded.
	Foster good relations Qualifications Scotland continues to promote a culture of trust where domestic status is respected. Access to hybrid working is universal across all eligible roles, ensuring that no tension exists between those with domestic legal partnerships and those without. Positive impact recorded.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Pregnancy / Maternity	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 Hybrid working guidance provides a framework for assessing the suitability of a role for hybrid working. However, Qualifications Scotland understands that there is no "one size fits all" approach. Individuals with this characteristic should read this guidance document in conjunction with Qualifications Scotland Maternity policy – and references the requirement for formal risk assessments being completed. Statistics from SQA workforce monitoring report 2021-2023 and 2023-2025 show that colleagues returning from a period of maternity leave is greater than 90%. https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/files_ccc/equalities-2023-workforce-monitoring.pdf This may be due to the flexibility available to colleagues as part of Qualifications Scotland Maternity leave policy and the support available to those returning. Hybrid working acts as a critical equaliser allowing mothers to maintain full-time hours and higher pay grades without the conflict of rigid office commutes.

	We record a potential positive impact for this equality group.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	If roles for this specific characteristic were assessed as either hybrid or office-based, Qualifications Scotland should follow Qualifications Scotland Maternity policy to ensure there is no additional risk. Home working supports pregnant women to continue working fully even in the later stages where physical mobility may become an issue. It can also provide greater flexibility for any appointments that may be needed, and the home may provide a more comfortable physical working environment. And may support their working arrangements on their return to work though providing greater flexibility on work location. Hybrid working and the ability to work from home also promotes flexibility with breastfeeding, expressing and supports longer breast feeding. We record a potential positive impact for this equality group.
	Foster good relations
	Qualifications Scotland's Hybrid Working framework fosters good relations by normalising location-neutral work, thereby reducing the 'flexibility stigma' often associated with pregnancy and maternity. By providing a consistent digital infrastructure, Qualifications Scotland ensures that expectant and new mothers remain integrated into their teams. Furthermore, the hybrid model supports the 'KIT process, allowing for inclusive participation in organisational culture regardless of physical location. This approach proactively tackles the 'maternal wall' bias by focusing on output rather than physical presence, creating a more equitable and supportive environment for all colleagues. We record a potential positive impact for this equality group.
Considered by QUALIFICATIONS SCOTLAND	General Equality Duty
Care experience (where relevant)	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	Care Experienced individuals are statistically more likely to face housing instability or lack a traditional "family safety net."

	If a Care Experienced employee needs to move house or experiences a change in their living situation (which can happen more frequently due to the lack of inherited assets or family-owned property), a hybrid model ensures their employment remains stable. They are not forced to resign because they had to move to a more affordable area further from a central office. Therefore, Hybrid working mitigates housing instability. Hybrid working shifts the focus from "fitting in" to a corporate office culture (which can be a barrier for those from non-traditional backgrounds) to objective output and performance and reduces 'class-based' bias. Positive Equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The "opportunity gap" for Care Experienced people is often tied to a lack of financial and emotional "buffer" zones. The costs associated with full-time office work—commuting, professional wardrobe, and expensive "on-the-go" lunches—disproportionately impact those without family financial support. Hybrid working significantly lowers the "cost of working," allowing individuals to build their own financial independence and savings. For some Care Experienced individuals who may have experienced trauma, a traditional open-plan office can be overstimulating or stressful. The ability to work from a "safe space" (home) for part of the week allows for better self-regulation and reduces burnout, putting them on an equal playing field with colleagues who have more stable support systems. Positive Equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.
	Foster good relations
	Fostering good relations involves breaking down the stigma and "othering" of care experience. By embracing hybrid working, Qualifications Scotland signals that it values different ways of living. It moves away from a "one size fits all" model, which implicitly tells Care Experienced staff that their unique life circumstances are accommodated and respected. Digital first hybrid tools allow for asynchronous mentorship. A Care Experienced employee can connect with mentors or "Care Experienced Networks" across the whole of Scotland via Teams, rather than being limited to whoever is in their physical office that day. This builds a wider sense of community and belonging within the Qualifications Scotland. Positive Equality related impact is therefore recorded in this area.

Flexible working	It is important to note that as of April 2024, the Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act granted all employees the Day One right to request flexible working. • Statutory Integration: Qualifications Scotland's Hybrid Working Guidance acts as a baseline, but colleagues in any protected group retain the legal right to request formal changes to their contract (e.g., permanent home working or staggered hours) from their first day of employment. • Process: Any request that falls outside the standard Hybrid Guidance will be processed via the Statutory Flexible Working Request procedure. Qualifications Scotland will only refuse such requests based on one of the eight defined business reasons, ensuring a transparent and fair application of the law.

Rationale

If you are proceeding with a decision that may have a negative impact and are not putting in place actions to mitigate against this, please explain how this is objectively justified.
All identified negative impacts have mitigating actions.