

Equality Impact Assessment (supporting guidance available)

Summary

Name of Policy or practice	MS Teams Conferencing		
New Policy or Revision	MS Teams Audio Conferencing		
Policy Owner (role)	Research Analyst		
Date Policy Owner Confirmed Completion	18/08/2025		
Agreed Schedule Review Date	16/09/2026	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 SQA 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]
Carry out pilot of process with Research and Evaluation team	Research Analyst	Completed	Evaluation of the pilot found that audio conferencing should be used, but only for one-to-one interviews due to phone user being unable to hide phone number from other participants and it being difficult to work out who is speaking.
Review and assess feedback on a regular basis from R&E team, evaluating how process has worked with key equality groups	Research Analyst	6 monthly from start of policy pilot	Simulated pilot as we did not get the opportunity to use software with live users so do not have evidence from all equality groups.

Identified Actions	General Equality Duty	Owner	Date	Comment & Review
Assess feedback from the pilot and adjust process to remove any discriminatory practices	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010	Research Analyst	Ongoing	- When conducting the pilot, we found that participants' phone numbers were visible to all participants in a focus group. We also found that it was difficult for the participant using audio conferencing to understand who was speaking in a group setting. For these reasons, we will only offer audio conferencing for one-to-one interviews, not for focus groups. - When participants called into the call, there were more steps involved, including dialling the phone number, giving the meeting ID and saying their name, that could potentially cause challenges for older people who may be unfamiliar this technology. We would opt to call the participant, rather than have them call us, where possible in order to mitigate the risk of the participant dropping out of the call. - There could be problems with participants experiencing anxiety when receiving a call from an unknown number. To mitigate this, we informed participants of the number that would call them to take part in the interview in the recruitment email.
Review process annually to assess the impact and accessibility for the protected characteristics of age, disability and care experience	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010	Research Analyst	One year from beginning of policy	

Policy Aims

What is the rationale for this policy or practice?
This policy has been proposed to allow research participants an alternative option for taking part in online interviews. Currently, research participants can only take part in online interviews and focus groups by joining a video link to the MS Teams app or by joining via the browser. This proposed adaptation to the current functionality will allow research participants to join a call by dialling in using just a phone number. This will allow users who are unable or unwilling to join a video call through the MS Teams app or by clicking on a link to the browser to do so. Adding this functionality will also act as a barrier to a single point of failure if a research participant has issues accessing the MS Teams video call through the usual route. After piloting the software, we found that this functionality was not effective in a focus group setting. The policy will therefore only apply to one-to-one interviews.
What evidence is there to support the implementation or development of this policy or practice?
- Some people, particularly older people, may have issues using MS Teams - Previous issues with research participants opting to take part over the phone and being unable to make a call using laptop or record the interview using work phone = gap in the existing technology available - When piloting the software, we found that this functionality worked well as an alternative to using MS Teams, but only for interviews, not for focus groups or group calls.
What are the aims of this policy or practice?
The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams.
How is the content of these aims relevant to equality groups?
The aim of this policy relates to equality groups as it makes the current process more accessible to those who may struggle with technology or be wary of clicking internet links.

Evidence, Consultation and Engagement

What stakeholders have you engaged with in the development of this policy or practice?	
Research and Evaluation team members, IT team members, business architects Will also engage with a range of research participants during the pilot	
What evidence about equality groups do you have to support this assessment?	
Age	Evidence supports the suggestion that older people may be less willing to use software such as MS Teams and would benefit from the option of dialling into calls using a phone number. For example, research by AgeUK shows that one in three over 65s lack basic skills to use the internet successfully (AgeUK, 2024). Research based on ONS data also found that internet non-use in the UK was associated with older age (Ueno, et al., 2023). A 2024 YouGov poll found that those aged 55+ had the highest proportion of respondents of all age groups who preferred using mobile phone calls to communicate with friends and family and the lowest proportion of respondents who preferred making video calls (YouGov, 2024). Further research shows older adults are distrustful of the internet, suggesting that they may feel more comfortable using a phone to take part in interviews (Knowles, et al., 2018; Chakraborty, et al. 2013). If the only option is to take part in research interviews through MS Teams, older stakeholders may be at risk of exclusion from participating in research that SQA carries out, meaning that their views will not be represented in the data (Reneland-Forsman, 2018). When piloting the software, when participants called into the call, there were more steps involved, including dialling the phone number, giving the meeting ID and saying their name, that could potentially cause challenges for older people or younger people who may be unfamiliar this technology. We would opt to call the participant, rather than have them call us, where possible in order to mitigate the risk of the participant dropping out of the call
Disability	Disability covers a wide group of people with diverse needs so it is important to be aware that different disabled people will interact with this proposed policy change differently. Some disabled people may find making phone calls more difficult, while others may find making MS Teams calls challenging and would prefer to make a phone call. For example, research carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic found that moving research online made it easier for some people with learning disabilities to participate in research but that using a new software (MS Teams) that they weren't familiar with caused issues for other participants with learning disabilities (Mikulak, et al., 2022). Further

	research found that some people with intellectual and physical disabilities face significant restrictions and barriers as we move to an increasingly digitised world, such as lack of alt captions, poor keyboard navigation, poor colour contrast, small buttons on devices, overloaded websites or apps, or trust in devices and websites (Rathee, et al. 2023; Ueno, et al., 2023; Bureau of Internet Accessibility, 2022; Baumgartner, et al, 2021). When piloting the software, it was found that there could be problems with participants experiencing anxiety when receiving a call from an unknown number. To mitigate this, we informed participants of the number that would call them to take part in the interview in the recruitment email. Therefore, it is important to offer an alternative mode of taking part in interviews so that the views of this diverse group of people can be captured in SQA research
Race	No evidence of a relationship between race and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Religion or Belief	No evidence of a relationship between religion and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Sex	No evidence of a relationship between sex and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Sexual Orientation	No evidence of a relationship between sexual orientation and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Gender Re-assignment (Gender identity and transgender)	While no research studies have specifically explored the relationship between gender re-assignment and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills, several studies have indicated that some transgender people prefer to turn their cameras off during video calls when feeling dysphoric. For example, a study exploring trans students' experiences of online learning found that being required to turn cameras on caused significant distress to some trans people due to seeing themselves on camera or not knowing whether the online environment would be safe for them to express their gender identity (Brockback, et al., 2021). Further research has support this evidence, suggesting that being on camera is a persistent issue that some trans people face (Baerwolf, 2023; Charlie Health, 2025; Schultz, 2021). Offering an alternative method for accessing interviews may help to reduce anxiety that transgender participants may feel about the prospect of joining a video call, even if they have the option to turn their camera off
Marriage/Civil Partnership	No evidence of a relationship between marriage/civil partnership and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Pregnancy / Maternity	No evidence of a relationship between pregnancy/maternity and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills
Care experience (where relevant)	Research by Harvey, et al. (2023) found that 'looked after' children were a hard-to-reach population in research and that audio-only interviews may provide them with more anonymity to feel comfortable taking part in research. Privacy was also found to be an important need for care experienced children, alongside having less financially burdensome

	options than using the internet (Mannay, et al., 2022). Further research has supported this evidence, finding that care experienced children in Scotland are disadvantaged by being less likely to have access to broadband and internet provision (McGhee and Roesch-Marsh, 2020)
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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
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. Evidence suggests that older age groups are more distrustful of and unfamiliar with using the internet and prefer to communicate through phone call. The aim of this policy will therefore have a positive impact on older people as it offers an alternative method for them to take part in research, therefore their views will be represented in the data. See evidence detailed in the previous section.
	- During the pilot we found that there were several steps involved for participants to dial into the call, including typing the phone number in, typing in the meeting ID into their keypad and then saying their name verbally. We felt that this could be challenging for people who are younger or older who may not be as familiar with this technology. To mitigate this, we opted to call participants instead so that they could enter the interview by just accepting the call on their phone. - The process will be reviewed annually to assess the impact and accessibility of this process against age.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group which advance equality of opportunity between persons who share this relevant protected characteristic (older or younger age) and persons who do not share it because it offers an alternative way for people to take part in research interviews and have their views and perspectives included in SQA research.

	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (age) which will promote and foster good relations between people as it will allow a way for older and younger people who may struggle with technology to take part in an interview in a way that does not make them uncomfortable or stressed.
	To ensure that this policy supports the fostering of good relations between this equality group (age) and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Disability	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. Evidence suggests that some people with disabilities may find using the internet challenging for a variety of reasons and prefer to communicate through phone call. The aim of this policy will therefore have a positive impact on people with disabilities as it offers an alternative method for them to take part in research, therefore their views will be represented in the data.
	See specific evidence detailed in the previous section.
	- The process will be reviewed annually to assess the impact and accessibility of this process against disability. - The pilot found that receiving a phone call from an unknown number could cause anxiety for participants. To mitigate this risk, we opted to inform participants of the number they would receive the call from prior to interview. - During the pilot we found that there were several steps involved for participants to dial into the call, including typing the phone number in, typing in the meeting ID into their keypad and then saying their name verbally. We felt that this could be challenging for some people with disability, for example those with motor skill impediments or those that use assistive software. To mitigate this, we opted to call participants instead so that they could enter the interview by just accepting the call on their phone.
	Advance equality of opportunity

	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (age) which will promote and foster good relations between people who are disabled and people who are not disabled as it will allow an easier way for those disabled people who may struggle with technology to take part in an interview
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (disability) which will promote and foster good relations between people who have a disability and people who do not as it will allow a way for people with some disabilities to take part in an interview in a way that has greater ease of use
	To ensure that this policy supports the fostering of good relations between this equality group (disability) and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic
Considered by SQA	General Equality Duty
Care experience (where relevant)	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. Evidence suggests that some people with care experience are less likely to have access to the internet and that having the option of dialling into an interview by phone would help encourage more care experienced people to take part in research. The aim of this policy will therefore have a positive impact on care experienced people as it offers an alternative method for them to take part in research, therefore their views will be represented in the data.
	See specific evidence detailed in the previous section.
	- The process will be reviewed annually to assess the impact and accessibility of this process against people with care experience - There was no evidence from the pilot that identified specific challenges for care experienced people
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (care experience) which will advance equality of opportunity between people who are care experienced and people who are not as it will help remove barriers to accessing research interviews on MS Teams for people who are less likely to have access to the internet.

	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic. Foster good relations The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (care experienced) which will promote and foster good relations between people who are care experienced and people who are not as it will provide evidence to people who are care experienced that SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
Protected characteristic	General Equality Duty
Race	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. No evidence of a relationship between race and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills. Advance equality of opportunity The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (race) which will advance the equality of opportunity as while there is no evidence of a relationship between race and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills, race may intersect with other protected characteristics that make people of different races more disadvantaged in regards to use of and access to technology. To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic Foster good relations The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (race) which will promote and foster good relations between people of different races as it will provide evidence to people of different races that SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
Protected characteristic	General Equality Duty
Sex	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010

	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. No evidence of a relationship between sex and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (sex) which will advance the equality of opportunity as while there is no evidence of a relationship between sex and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills, sex may intersect with other protected characteristics that make people of different sexes more disadvantaged in regards to use of and access to technology.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (sex) which will promote and foster good relations between people of all sexes as it will provide evidence to people who are care experienced that SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
Protected characteristic	General Equality Duty
Sexual Orientation	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. No evidence of a relationship between sexual orientation and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills.
	Advance equality of opportunity

	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (sexual orientation) which will advance the equality of opportunity as while there is no evidence of a relationship between sexual orientation and distrust in internet/lack of digital technology skills, sexual orientation may intersect with other protected characteristics that make people of different sexual orientations more disadvantaged in regards to use of and access to technology.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (sexual orientation) which will promote and foster good relations between people of different orientations as it will provide evidence that SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
Protected characteristic	General Equality Duty
Gender Re-assignment (Gender identity and transgender)	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. There is evidence that some transgender people may experience discomfort being on video calls, therefore an alternative method of joining an interview may help alleviate anxiety or feelings of gender dysphoria.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (gender re-assignment (gender identity and transgender)). The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (gender re-assignment (gender identity and transgender) which will advance equality of opportunity between people who are have or are experiencing gender re-assigning and people who are not as it will help remove barriers to accessing research interviews on MS Teams for people may experiencing anxiety being on video call.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations

	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (gender re-assignment (gender identity and transgender)) which will promote and foster good relations between people who are or have experienced gender re-assignment and people who have not as it will provide evidence to people who are transgender that SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
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
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. There is no evidence of a relationship between marriage/civil partnership and a distrust in the internet or a lack of digital technology skills.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Marriage/Civil Partnership). The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Marriage/Civil Partnership) which will advance equality of opportunity between people who are married or in a civil partnership and people who are not as all will be offered the same opportunity to use an alternative method of joining the call.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Marriage/Civil Partnership) which will promote and foster good relations between people who are married or in a civil partnership as it will provide evidence SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
Protected characteristic	General Equality Duty
Pregnancy / Maternity	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. There is no evidence of a relationship between pregnancy/maternity and a distrust in the internet/lack of digital technology skills.

	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Pregnancy / Maternity). The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Pregnancy/maternity) which will advance equality of opportunity between people who are pregnant or have children and people who are/do not as all will be offered the same opportunity to use an alternative method of joining the call.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (Pregnancy/maternity) which will promote and foster good relations between people who are pregnant or have children and people who are/do not as it will provide evidence SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.
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
	The aim of this policy is to provide an alternative method for research participants to take part in online interviews by dialling into MS Teams interviews by telephone and for these calls to be recorded on MS Teams. There is no evidence of a relationship between religion or belief and a distrust in the internet/lack of digital technology skills.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The aim of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (religion or belief). The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (religion or belief) which will advance equality of opportunity between people who hold certain beliefs or are a member of a religion and people who are not as all will be offered the same opportunity to use an alternative method of joining the call.
	To ensure that this policy support and advancement of equality of opportunity between this equality group and others, all research participants should be offered to take part in interviews either by MS Teams link or by dialling in regardless of characteristic.
	Foster good relations
	The aims of this policy will have a positive impact on this equality group (religion or belief) which will promote and foster good relations between people who have this characteristic and people who do not as it will provide evidence SQA is interested in their views and is making efforts to capture them through offering an alternative way to do so.

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.

N/A