

Equality Impact Assessment (supporting guidance available)

Action Plan

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

Agreed Schedule Review Date	Aug 2026	Additional Schedule Review Date	
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Explain how you will monitor and record the actual impact on equality groups, including how the evidence can be revisited to measure the actual impact.

Required Actions	Owner	Date	Comment & Review
Actions taken to monitor the implementation of policy and the impact on equality groups (evidence and consultation)			[ONGOING RECORD]
[LIST]			
The Responsible Business team will collect and monitor feedback from volunteers and hosts, to ensure that staff continue to have accessible and positive opportunities	Responsible Business Manager	July 2025	
Take an annual report of those staff undertaking volunteering opportunities by PC	Responsible Business Manager	Annually from December 2023	

Identified Actions	General Equality Duty	Owner	Date	Comment & Review
[LIST]	[CROSS REFERENCE]			

Policy Aims

Name of Policy or practice	Volunteering Policy
New Policy or Revision	Revision
Name of Policy Owner	Head of Appointee Management (Responsible Business Team co-authors)
Date Policy Owner Confirmed Completion	Aug 2023

What is the rationale for this policy or practice?
<p>SQA is committed to being an active corporate citizen. We do this by sharing our expertise, skills, and resources, and by creating partnerships which have a positive and sustainable impact on local communities. Our volunteering schemes allow staff to participate in supported volunteering activities and develop skills while adding value to our communities.</p> <p>This policy is part of our Responsible Business Strategy under the 'Community Pillar' and aligns with our value of 'enabling' – to be part of the community.</p> <p>SQA is a member of Business in the Community Scotland which provide networking opportunities within our local communities.</p>
What evidence is there to support the implementation or development of this policy or practice?

SQA has a commitment to young people through our Investors in Young People Award. Our volunteering schemes allow staff to participate in supported volunteering activities and develop skills while adding value to our communities and young people.

SQA is also a Corporate Parent and has a duty to provide care-experienced children and young people with the kind of support that any good parent would give their own children, to ensure that all aspects of their development are nurtured.

Feedback from volunteering activities:

Employability

In 2019, 10 SQA colleagues ran a CV writing and employability workshop in a Midlothian high school.

Partner Feedback – High School (Midlothian)

I am delighted that it went well. The students involved today have been extremely positive about the event, so we look forward to rolling out further events such as this in the future.

<https://twitter.com/sqanews/status/1200076709552373760>

Partner Feedback – High School (Midlothian)

Hello

"On behalf of our High School I would just like to thank the SQA for delivering our employability session today. It was fantastic to see how engaged our pupils were in the event and how much they took from the session. It was also great to see one of our former pupils delivering the session also and his successes. We look forward to welcoming you again for future events".

Pupil Support Leader

<https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/people/sqa-boss-helps-dalkeith-pupils-get-work-ready-2010840>

SQA staff had the following feedback on facilitating that CV writing and employability workshop:

Staff Feedback

I feel the entire day worked well and ran smoothly. All involved seemed to benefit in some way or another. I found this experience really rewarding to connect with pupils giving them insight and helpful tips to help with interviews. I came away from this experience feeling as though I had helped someone and feeling good about my role within the SQA. I would really like to do this again as I found it beneficial.

SQA Staff attended a local community farm to volunteer on a team day out, undertaking a wide range of farming activities, including preparing food, tending crops, and designing a scarecrow!

Cyrenians Farm

Partner Feedback - Cyrenians Farm

We are pleased you had a wonderful day – it was a lot of fun for us also! It is the first time this year the whole community and residents have been out at the same time getting involved on the farm so thanks for the great idea to make scarecrows!

Staff Feedback – Cyrenians Farm

Well organised, and the team activity brought us all together. On the farm we were well versed on what was expected of us. We were treated to a wonderful lunch with tea and homemade brownies all made from produce sourced on the farm. It offers the chance to give something back to the community or make a difference to the people around you. It also provides an opportunity to develop new skills or build on existing experience and knowledge. There is nothing as fulfilling as achieving positive change through passionately volunteering and contribute toward the transformation of people's lives.

As a part of SQA's environmental commitment, staff support local beach clean-ups. Staff attended Portobello beach to litter pick in 2022, and got the following feedback:

Beach Clean

Partner Feedback – Beach Clean

We do not have partner feedback as we run this ourselves as a private event. However, we did input to the Beach watch survey data and received the following thank you email.

Thanks for adding your latest Beach watch survey data.

Here is a link to the survey summary

<http://www.mcsuk.org/beachwatch/beach/fisherrow-1/survey100m/2018-12-20/summary>.

You can download a pdf and send to your volunteers to show them what an excellent job they have done!

Thank you for organising a Beach watch clean-up. Your participation is vital for our continued fight against beach litter.

Best wishes

The Beach watch Team

Staff Feedback – Beach Clean

All communication leading up to the event was timely and appropriate.

I have worked for SQA for a year, and this is the first volunteering event I have signed up for. There are opportunities for everyone, regardless of job title, physical ability, or anything else. Responsible Business team can answer any questions. Cannot recommend volunteering highly enough and I am looking forward to the next event

Our rationale in requesting feedback both from the volunteer and the organisation is to continually learn and reflect on the approaches we take both to engage organisations and to support staff. Our feedback must provide a purpose which is to the betterment of our approaches to volunteering and the people and organisations we support. Much of the feedback that we collect will be informal and ad hoc. Where opportunities arise to gather more formal feedback we endeavour to do so.

SQA worked with Modern Apprentices to work on a community project, where they helped people with disabilities, and as a result, a Cherry Road member was able to come to SQA to gain admin experience.

Cherry Road Disability Centre

[The member] has been so grateful for the opportunity, welcome and support the MA's at SQA gave him. It has had an enormous impact for him due to his learning difficulties. What he learned at SQA and just being able to be part of an office environment and see how it operate was

invaluable to him. Having the support of the SQA Modern Apprentices here at Cheery Road Centre has also been amazing for us all. Thanks, SQA “Cherry Road Manager”

Wellbeing and volunteering

Reputable Evidence that links Volunteering to improved wellbeing - Volunteer wellbeing: what works and who benefits? - What Works Wellbeing
Volunteering is associated with enhanced wellbeing, but context matters. There is high quality evidence that volunteering is positively linked to enhanced wellbeing, including improved life satisfaction, increased happiness and decreases in symptoms of depression.

We cannot, however, categorically state that volunteering causes improved wellbeing, though the two are correlated.

What are the aims of this policy or practice?

The aims of this policy and overall purpose of volunteering are to:

- Be a responsible business and active corporate citizens. By sharing our expertise, skills, and resources, and by creating partnerships which have a positive and sustainable impact on local communities.
- Ensure that our volunteering schemes are inclusive, enabling and allow staff to participate in supported volunteering activities and develop skills while adding value to our communities.
- Demonstrate our values and promote practical opportunities for all to get involved.
- Provide guidance on SQA’s Hands Up Volunteering Scheme for staff.

To ensure that our volunteering schemes are inclusive, enabling and allow staff to participate in supported volunteering activities and develop skills while adding value to our communities, opportunities include but are not limited to:

- Employability Skills Workshops – session to take young people through CV writing, application forms, and interview prep for employment
- Cyrenian’s Farm Day – creating an outdoor space to get colleagues working together in an unfamiliar environment, and to learn to work together in person. The farm had volunteers to help them implement their community projects

- Beach Clean – This was an exercise to get employees out of their comfort zone and work within their teams, forming bonds, while also giving back and fulfilling SQA’s environmental obligations
- Launch Foods – Staff prepared food and handed it out from the van to young people and school-age learners in deprived areas.

In providing a broad range of opportunities we gather feedback to ensure that our aim is being continually met.

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

SQA is committed to equality of opportunity and to a culture that respects difference. We believe that as an employer and public body, we can play a leading part in promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion more widely.

To be a responsible business and active corporate citizens and by sharing our expertise, skills, and resources, and by creating partnerships which have a positive and sustainable impact on local communities are our focus in creating a volunteering programme. Our volunteering programmes are inclusive, enabling and allow staff to participate in supported volunteering activities and develop skills while adding value to our communities.

It demonstrates our values and allows practical opportunities for *all* to get involved.

We have outlined in the previous section the range of opportunities open to all staff. We fully acknowledge that for staff with Protected Characteristics there may be additional relevancy in terms of engaging with volunteering opportunities particularly in relation to equality of opportunity and fostering good relations, these could include but are not limited to:

- Continually ensuring there is a broad range of volunteering activities which is representative of society. This should include volunteering opportunities with community groups, including but not limited to engaging with groups which are representative of a broad range of religions/beliefs; races; ages; sexes; sexual orientation as an example. We need to regularly review our opportunities to ensure that we meet this aim and should include external engagement with community groups where we consider that we do not have an equal representation of equality groups. Where we can, we should also take opportunities to engage in intersectional volunteering opportunities
- Actively promoting volunteering opportunities within SQA, particularly in relation to engagement with SQA Equality Networks
- Providing a channel of communication between Responsible Business and colleagues to highlight volunteering opportunities with a particular relevancy to equality groups

In terms of the potential relevancy to colleagues with protected characteristics and the impact that volunteering may have we will seek to gather information through feedback (both informal and formal) and wider evidence to consider:

- Whether there is any correlation between a representative range of volunteering opportunities on how staff perceive how their protected characteristic is valued and respected in SQA
- Whether there is evidence to support the view that engagement in volunteering opportunities has a positive impact on staff mental and physical wellbeing
- Whether providing a representative range of volunteering opportunities supports the fostering of good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. And if not, what further action we can take.

In terms of ensuring a representative and inclusive range of volunteering opportunities we require to take into consideration that:

- Opportunities are accessible, including but not limited to the physical environment, awareness of allergies
- Opportunities support the wider betterment of a broad range of the community, and where not take action to support this
- We embrace staff ideas where to support a community, but be mindful to not over focus on one community or equality group over another
- Take opportunities to connect with SQA corporate parenting as we consider care experienced to be an additional equality group
- Use feedback from volunteering organisations and from colleagues to inform our understanding of approaches to ensure an inclusive range of volunteering opportunities
- We engage with organisations which have values like our own and carrying out appropriate screening checks on organisations to ensure that inclusive organisations are engaged with
- We promote appropriate conduct with staff engaging in volunteering activities

Evidence, Consultation and Engagement

What stakeholders have you engaged with in the development of this policy or practice?	
Internal:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SQA Board and Executive Management Team • Human Resources and Organisational Development • Staff– feedback on activities • Staff ideas in respect of new opportunities and suggestions • Network discussions/feedback • Volunteering registration forms
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisations – feedback on activities • ENEI – engagement, joint initiatives • Business in the Community Scot – engagement, joint initiatives • Networking opportunities sharing best practise.
Feedback is collated on MS Forms and used for improving our service and opportunities.	

What evidence about equality groups do you have to support this assessment?	
Age	<p>We know that mental wellbeing is poor in older people mental health, linking volunteering to mental health</p> <p>We know that 37% of SQA staff are 50+</p> <p>“We broadly define 'later life' as starting at 50 years. While we acknowledge that many people this age do not consider themselves 'old', we have included 50-year-olds as part of later life due to several critical factors. Many people will begin to experience physical decline or deterioration in their 50s”</p> <p>Older people: statistics Mental Health Foundation</p>
Disability	We know that people with a disability are at increased risk pf poor mental health

	<p>“In 2018, an estimated 17.4 million (32.9%) adults with disabilities experienced frequent mental distress, defined as 14 or more reported mentally unhealthy days in the past 30 days.”</p> <p>The Mental Health of People with Disabilities CDC</p>
Race	No evidence found suggesting impacts on race due to this policy
Religion or Belief	No evidence found suggesting impacts on religion or belief due to this policy
Sex	No evidence found suggesting impacts on the protected characteristic of sex due to this policy
Sexual Orientation	<p>It is widely known that there is an increased risk of poorer mental health in LGBTI+ people than those who are not LGBTI+. A 2018 report from Stonewall claims: “Half of LGBT people (52 per cent) said they’ve experienced depression in the last year, with another ten per cent saying they think they might have experienced depression.”</p> <p>https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_health.pdf</p>
Gender Re-assignment (Gender identity and transgender)	<p>We know that there is an increased risk of poorer mental health in trans people</p> <p>“Two thirds of trans people (67 per cent) have experienced depression in the last year. Seven in ten non-binary people (70 per cent)”</p> <p>https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_health.pdf</p>
Marriage/Civil Partnership	No evidence found suggesting impacts on Marriage/Civil Partnership due to this policy
Pregnancy / Maternity	<p>We know that cohesion with teams is important, and new parents can often feel separate from their team</p> <p>“According to a survey by Workingmums.co.uk lack of confidence is one of the main hurdles for women who want to return to the workplace” therefore encouraging contact with colleagues on maternity leave can support their confidence and wellbeing.</p>
Care experience (Where relevant)	<p>We know that there is an increased risk of poorer mental health in Care Experienced people</p> <p>“Care experienced children and young people have consistently been found to have much higher rates of mental health difficulties than the general population, including a significant proportion who have more than one condition”</p> <p>https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/mental_health_looked_after_children.pdf</p>

SQA Do not collect data of staff based on Care Experience.

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
All protected characteristic	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	No impacts
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team (RBT) issue a questionnaire, including additional requirements or access needs of team members. This can also highlight where staff members may need reasonable adjustments. The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster Good Relations
Age	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	Young and older people/ and mental health – volunteering promotes wellbeing, eliminates existing societal barrier

	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, on access needs of team members, including ensuring that the activities are age appropriate. The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Disability	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	Disability and mental health are linked as we know that people with disabilities suffer more from mental health issues – volunteering promotes wellbeing, eliminates existing societal barrier
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, additional requirements, or access needs of team members. The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Race	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010

	No impacts were identified against this characteristic
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, additional requirements, or access needs
	•
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing. Positive Impact recorded
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
	No negative impacts were identified against this characteristic.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, including food handling requirements, or times of the day to engage in religious practice. The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster good relations

	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Sex	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	No negative impacts were identified against this characteristic
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, including food handling requirements, or times of the day to engage in religious practice. The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Sexual Orientation	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	It is known that mental health is poor among LGBT people. It is also known that volunteering promotes good mental health outcomes. [By providing opportunities to give back and volunteer, we may have a positive impact on people with a minority sexual orientation, who are systemically affected by poor mental health.

	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, The RBT then tailors the team day to suit the team's needs – ensuring that all members can meaningfully participate.
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
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
	Trans people and mental health – volunteering promotes wellbeing, eliminates existing societal barrier. It allows everyone to be themselves and meet colleagues whom they may not meet in a work environment and build relationships
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, additional requirements, or access needs.
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
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
	No negative impacts were identified against this characteristic
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Foster good relations
Protected Characteristic	General Equality Duty
Pregnancy / Maternity	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	We know that cohesion with teams is important, and new parents can often feel separate from their team
	Volunteering promotes wellbeing, eliminates existing societal barrier
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Prior to a team taking part in a volunteering team day, the Responsible Business Team issue a questionnaire, including questions on allergies, types of activities to avoid, or seated activities, breaks, additional requirements, or access needs
	Foster good relations

	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.
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
	Care experienced people and mental health – volunteering promotes wellbeing, eliminates existing societal barrier
	Foster good relations
	We know that volunteering can bring together colleagues that otherwise may not interact. This creates relationships that can benefit work environments and wellbeing.

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.
No negative impacts identified.