



SQA Equality Mainstreaming Report 2021–23

Publication date: April 2023

Publication code: FE8778

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority
The Optima Building, 58 Robertson Street, Glasgow G2 8DQ
Lowden, 24 Wester Shawfair, Dalkeith, EH22 1FD

www.sqa.org.uk

The information in this publication may be reproduced in support of SQA qualifications. If it is reproduced, SQA should be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be used for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from SQA. It must not be reproduced for trade or commercial purposes.

© *Scottish Qualifications Authority*

This document can be produced, on request, in alternative formats, including large type, Braille and numerous community languages. For further details telephone SQA's Customer Contact Centre on 0845 279 1000.

SQA is committed to using plain English. We will try to make our publications as easy and straightforward to understand as we can, and will try to avoid all unnecessary jargon. If there's any language in this document that you feel is hard to understand, or could be improved, please write to Editor, Editorial Team, at the Glasgow address or email: editor@sqa.org.uk.

Contents

Introduction	1
About SQA	2
SQA as an employer	3
Public sector equality duty	4
Section 1: Mainstreaming equality	5
SQA's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion	5
SQA Corporate Plan 2020–23	6
Equality Impact Assessment	7
Governance and responsibilities	9
Governance model and groups	9
Equality Steering Group	9
Equality Governance Structure	10
Procurement processes and award criteria	12
Responsible business	12
Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014: corporate parenting	13
Children's rights	13
Section 2: SQA's Equality Outcomes 2021–25 progress update	14
Equality Outcome 1	14
Fair Work Convention	14
HR policy review	14
Equality Impact Assessments	15
Collaboration with trade unions	15
Recruitment advertising	15
Recruitment application forms	15
Learning and development	16
Virtual learning	16
Values for all	16
Line manager programme	17
Induction Programme	17
Mentoring programme	18
Modern Apprentices	18
SQA Young Talent Strategy	19
SQA's young talent	19
People Strategy	20
People Survey	21
Succession Planning	22
Race at Work Charter and Action Plan	22

Disability Confident Leader	22
Carer-positive employer	23
Employee Network Groups	23
Herald and GenAnalytics Diversity Awards	26
Payment of the real living wage	26
Employee monitoring data collection and analysis	26
Equal pay audit and action to tackle the gender pay gap	27
Equality Outcome 2	28
Equality and inclusion in qualifications design, assessment and quality assurance	28
Equality review of SQA qualifications	28
Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications Policy Review	29
Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) for exam diet and contingencies in 2022	30
SQA Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group	31
Provision of support, guidance, and training on inclusive design for development of assessment	31
Provision of assessment arrangements for disabled candidates	33
Learning for sustainability	35
Our progress to date	35
Equality Outcome 3	37
Appendices	38
Appendix 1: Summary of workforce information	38
Age	38
Disability	39
Marital and civil partnership	40
Race	40
Religion or belief	41
Sex	42
Sexual orientation	43
Conclusion	44
Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018	44
Appendix 2: Links to other information	45

Introduction

SQA is required by the Public Sector Equality Duty to report every two years. This report covers the period from April 2021 to March 2023 and includes updates on our:

- ◆ progress to mainstream equality
- ◆ progress against SQA's equality outcomes 2021–23
- ◆ workforce equality monitoring data
- ◆ pay gap information and statement of equal pay

We place equality at the heart of our work and are deeply aware of our responsibilities towards our staff, all our customers and, most importantly, individual learners.

Education and training are at the core of Scotland's heritage and culture. They unlock potential, and bring benefits to all of us and to the communities we live in. Our equalities work driven not only by legislative requirements but also by recognition of the diverse needs of the communities across Scotland. We aim to ensure these needs are taken account of and reflected in all our activities.

As an organisation, responding during the global pandemic was one of the greatest challenges we have ever faced. We have changed the way our people work, and this is a testament to our workforce, who pulled together throughout the pandemic and demonstrated their resilience.

An extensive education reform programme is underway — the National Discussion on Scottish Education to develop a vision for the future of education in Scotland and Professor Hayward's Independent Review of Qualifications and Assessment. As part of this reform, three new national education bodies will be created: a qualifications body, a national agency for Scottish education, and an independent inspectorate body. These will replace SQA and Education Scotland. The report by Professor Ken Muir, [Putting Learners at the Centre: Towards a Future Vision for Scottish Education](#), discussed how these new national bodies should be established and was clear in its recommendation that this transition would be taken forward in partnership with the bodies subject to reform.

SQA will continue to deliver for learners, schools, colleges and other customers while working with others to ensure a smooth transition to the new body. We recognise that this reform brings significant opportunities for change and for ensuring learners, teachers and lecturers are at the heart of the education system. We are committed to ensuring that the needs of our most disadvantaged and marginalised communities are at the forefront of our minds, not only as we continue to recover from the impact of COVID-19 but also in ensuring equality is embedded in everything we do. We hope that this report shows some evidence of our commitment.

About SQA

As Scotland's accreditation and awarding body, SQA provides products, services and skills, and training and education — all of which have a positive impact on individuals, organisations, and society. We embed our values — progressive, enabling, and trusted — in all our work.

SQA's functions are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 as amended by the Scottish Qualifications Act 2002.

The organisation has two main roles: accreditation and awarding qualifications.

SQA Accreditation:

- ◆ accredits qualifications other than degrees
- ◆ approves, and quality assures awarding bodies that plan to enter people for these qualifications

[Find out more about SQA Accreditation.](#)

SQA (awarding body):

- ◆ devises and develops qualifications
- ◆ validates qualifications (makes sure they are well written and meet the needs of learners and tutors) reviews qualifications to ensure they are up to date
- ◆ arranges for, assists in, and carries out, the assessment of people taking SQA qualifications
- ◆ quality-assures education and training establishments which offer SQA qualifications
- ◆ issues certificates to candidates

Within these roles, we offer a range of services for businesses and training providers, ranging from course and centre approval through customised awards, to endorsement, credit rating and licensing services.

SQA's Performance Framework is guided by our mission, vision, and purpose statement, supported by our values (trusted, progressive and enabling) and modelled on the National Performance Framework for Scotland. Our strategic priorities for 2020–23 are defined by five outcomes, supported by a set of deliverables which are reviewed each year. In delivering the strategic priorities outlined in our corporate plan, SQA works in partnership with customers and stakeholders, in Scotland and elsewhere.

SQA as an employer

SQA is committed to being a supportive and inclusive employer. We have received recognition from various organisations, and also are members of and accredited by other organisations. We also offer various services to employees, as you can see from this list:

- ◆ Disability Confident Leader
- ◆ Carer Positive Employer
- ◆ Hidden Disability Sunflower Scheme Member
- ◆ Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion Member
- ◆ Happy to Talk Flexible Working Employer
- ◆ Accreditation as a Scottish Living Wage Employer
- ◆ Business in the Community Race at Work Charter Signatory
- ◆ Stonewall Diversity Champion
- ◆ Healthy Working Lives Gold Award winner
- ◆ Investor in Young People Gold Accreditation
- ◆ Developing the Young Workforce, 2019 Glasgow Apprenticeship challenge winners
- ◆ Dying to Work Charter Member
- ◆ RoPSA The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents Gold Award winner (Health & Safety Awards)
- ◆ Occupational Health Service
- ◆ HELP Employee Assistance Programme

We also support several employee-led groups:

- ◆ ACE (Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity) Network
- ◆ Disability Network
- ◆ MAC (Make A Change Group)
- ◆ Mental Health First Aiders
- ◆ Rainbow Network
- ◆ Women's Network
- ◆ Young Talent Network
- ◆ Parent & Carers Network

Public sector equality duty

The public sector equality duty (created by the Equality Act 2010) requires SQA to consider the needs of people when carrying out its day-to-day work in relation to employment and in delivering services.

The PSED, also known as the 'general equality duty', covers the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

The duties require SQA to have due regard to the need to:

- ◆ eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act
- ◆ advance equality of opportunity among all people
- ◆ foster good relations between different people when carrying out its activities

The Scottish Specific Duties require SQA to carry out the following activities:

- ◆ report on mainstreaming the equality duty
- ◆ publish equality outcomes and report progress
- ◆ assess and review policies and practices
- ◆ gather and use employee information
- ◆ publish gender pay gap information
- ◆ publish statements on equal pay
- ◆ consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement

We are required, as part of our Equality Mainstreaming Report, to include:

- ◆ an annual breakdown of employment monitoring information under the duty to gather and use employee information
- ◆ details of the progress made in gathering and using employment monitoring information to perform the general equality duty and
- ◆ information on the gender composition of our Board of Management

Section 1: Mainstreaming equality

SQA's commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion

As both a regulator and awarding body, 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 the promotion of equality and diversity more widely. We recognise that equality of access to education is crucial in unlocking significant opportunities in life, and we are aware of our responsibility to uphold both fairness for learners, and the credibility of Scotland's qualifications system.

SQA's commitment to fairness and equality is enshrined in its values, which set out the way that SQA's staff members are expected to work together and with others. We call these values:

- ◆ Trusted
- ◆ Enabling
- ◆ Progressive

Our commitment to equality is set out in SQA's Equality Outcomes, and we continue to strive to make improvements, where needed, in the qualifications and services we offer. Our equality outcomes guide our efforts to integrate equality further into the way we make our plans and decisions to the benefit of employees and customers.

SQA Corporate Plan 2020–23

SQA is committed to the Scottish Government’s vision for Scotland to be a world leading Fair Work Nation by 2025 where everyone has a right to equality of opportunity and can fulfil their potential.

As part of SQA’s [Corporate Plan 2020–23](#), to help us deliver on our purpose and mission, we identified the following outcomes:

- ◆ we provide a credible qualification system.
- ◆ we are flexible in meeting customer needs.
- ◆ we have a sustainable business operating model that is appropriately resourced in order to deliver our remit now and in the future.
- ◆ we are a thriving organisation, with quality jobs and a fair work environment for all our people.
- ◆ we are trusted, respected, and valued by our customers, stakeholders and partners.

These outcomes form our strategic priorities, and we ensure SQA’s operational plans are aligned to these commitments.

Scottish Government have agreed a one-year extension to SQA’s Corporate Plan to cover the period between April 2023 and March 2024.

Equality impact assessment

In September 2021, we entered a (two-year) Section 23 agreement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to improve our approach to carrying out equality impact assessments and to ensure compliance with regulation 5 of the public sector equality duty (PSED), ensuring our policies and practices are assessed for equality impacts. As part of this agreement, SQA is committed to ensuring that equality impact assessments are compliant with the PSED, and that appropriate support is in place to facilitate SQA staff to undertake EqlAs.

Detailed below is an update on the progress and work that has been carried out to further embed equality into our policies and practices.

During 2021–23 we have:

- ◆ Developed and implemented an Equality Impact Assessment Policy.
- ◆ Thoroughly reviewed, updated, and published revised EqlA processes.
- ◆ Reviewed governance and quality assurance relating to these processes.
- ◆ Improved EqlA templates and guidance to ensure that the general equality duty is fully considered and recorded as part completed EqlAs.
- ◆ Created a unique and dedicated internal intranet site to raise awareness of EqlA requirements and SQA's responsibilities.
- ◆ Developed a detailed and interactive EqlA training module to complement support provided by SQA's Corporate Equality Team.
- ◆ Supported employees across our Corporate HR and Organisational Development and Change Teams to attend external EqlA training delivered by Diversity McKenzie, Equality and Diversity Consultants
- ◆ Created an Equality Evidence Knowledge Hub on SQA's intranet site to support the completion of robust evidence-based EqlAs.
- ◆ Formed SQA's Equality Management Review Group (EMRG), which is responsible for reviewing EqlAs, providing feedback to policy owners, and approving completed EqlAs for external publication.
- ◆ Developed Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Equality Management Review Group, and processes to keep our ToR under review and to ensure the EMRG is fit for purpose.
- ◆ Created a detailed communications plan to share regular progress updates with all staff on the commitments set out in the EHRC Section 23 Agreement.
- ◆ Taken measures to encourage consideration of the impact on care experience as part of our EqlA process. SQA is committed to treating experience of care similarly to a protected characteristic. This is an important step in meeting our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- ◆ Communicated regular progress updates with all staff on the specific commitments set out in the EHRC Section 23 Agreement.

Our online EqlA training module builds on the Scottish Government's 'Mountains for All' video to give colleagues an understanding of the legal and ethical basis for considering equality impact. It sets out when and how EqlAs should be carried out, with clear guidance on how to use SQA's new EqlA form. In the summer of 2022, the Corporate Equality Team hosted Staff Information Programmes (SIPs) to raise awareness of SQA's responsibilities and to provide in-depth guidance using worked examples.

An important part of SQA's revised EqIA framework is the actions identified in impact assessments. EqIAs encourage policy owners to consider mitigating actions where negative impacts are identified, or actions they can take to further advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations. Actions arising from EqIAs are monitored and tracked by SQA's Corporate Equality Team, and EMRG. These include actions to monitor and support the equity of the policy or process being assessed, and actions to support compliance with the PSED.

By putting actions relating to equality in the hands of policy owners, we are ensuring that subject experts across SQA are considering the impact of their work on people from protected groups (and fulfilling our legal obligations).

In September 2022, our HR Team published 40 EqIAs on SQA's employment policies, procedures, and practices. In these EqIAs, around 250 individual actions have been identified, ranging from workforce data processing to policy revisions, based on the impacts identified.

Not every policy has a direct or indirect impact on protected equality groups. Where there is found to be no impact, we ensure that a screening review is undertaken. Other policies and processes that outline a broad process can be altered to incorporate an equality impact consideration step each time the process is followed. An example of this is in policy design: while we can complete an EqIA of the policy development framework effectively, new policies themselves are more equitable if the equality impact is considered at every step of the design process.

The EqIA is an effective tool for mainstreaming equality. By ensuring that all policies have equality impacts identified we will ensure SQA's policies and procedures are equitable. By training policy owners and encouraging them to engage with the EqIA process, we are building expertise throughout the organisation. By monitoring actions from EqIAs, we are ensuring that there are tangible benefits and positive impacts, owned by staff across the organisation.

We are committed to ensuring that Equality Impact Assessments are continually used as a tool to further the mainstreaming of equality in all areas of business across SQA.

SQA Equality Impact Assessments are published on our [Equality Webpage](#).

Governance and responsibilities

SQA's Board of Management exercises its duty to ensure compliance. An important part of the Board's role in governance is ensuring that equality is reflected in our strategic planning and strategy. SQA's Chief Executive is accountable for the fulfilment of SQA's equality duties and is supported in this by SQA's Executive Management Team and Equality Steering Group.

Governance model and groups

In 2022, we launched a new governance model (see diagram on next page) to ensure decision-making happens at the right level and place in SQA, whilst living our corporate values of being trusted, enabling and progressive. The new governance model — outlined below — is led by SQA's Executive Management Team (EMT) and supported by our Management Team.

These groups provide assurance to Scottish Government, SQA's EMT, Audit Committee, Performance Committee, and the Board of Management. Terms of reference for each of SQA's Governance Groups have been agreed to outline responsibilities.

Equality Steering Group

Our Equality Steering Group is chaired by SQA's Head of Strategic Planning & Governance.

The group is made up of representatives from across the organisation and employees with responsibility for implementing SQA's equality action plans.

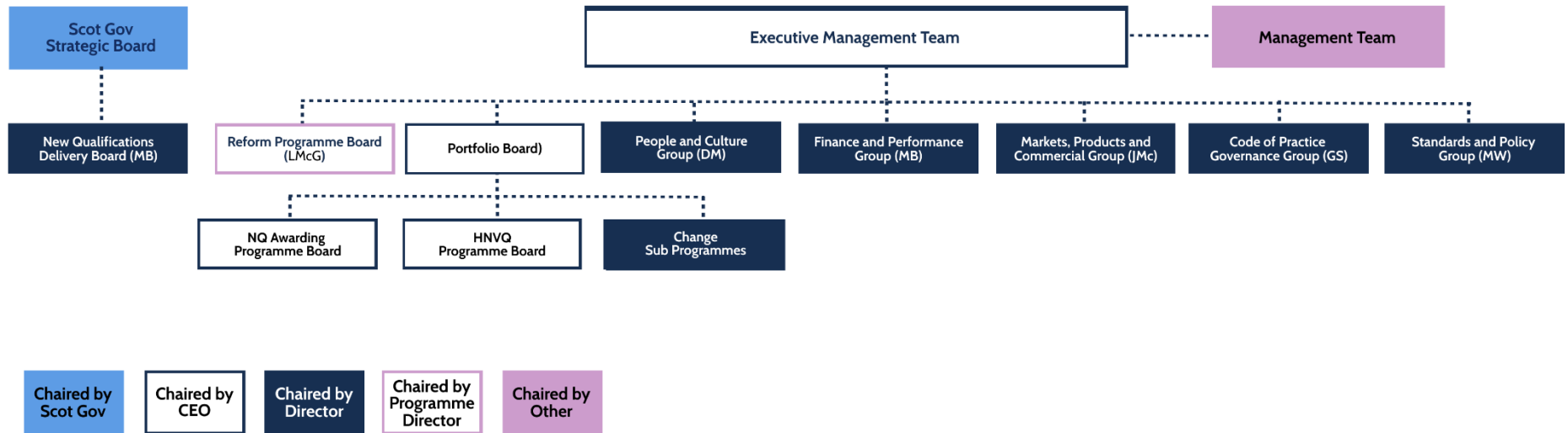
The group's purpose is to:

- ◆ promote and advocate increased understanding across the organisation of SQA's obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty
- ◆ support work to develop SQA's equality outcomes and equality action plans
- ◆ approve progress reports and employment monitoring reports
- ◆ ensure consistency across the organisation in SQA's approach to fulfilling Public Sector Equality Duty obligations
- ◆ provide a point of escalation and guidance for cross-organisational equality issues
- ◆ share good practice and solutions to common issues across the organisation
- ◆ support equality sub-groups and employee network groups, and monitor and record organisational progress in implementing SQA's equality action plans

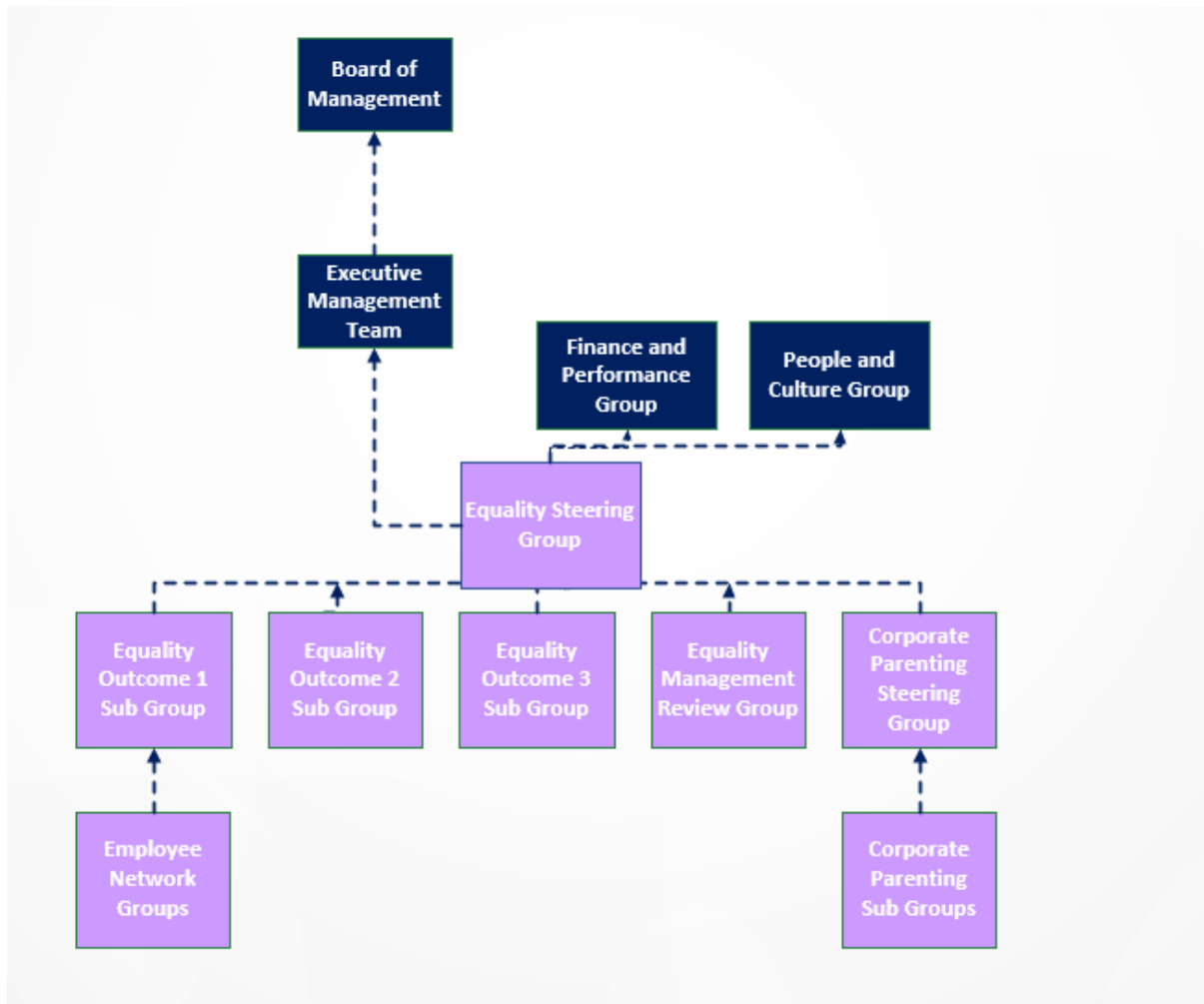
Our equality sub-groups, Equality Management Review Group and Corporate Parenting Steering report to our Equality Steering Group.

Our Equality Steering Group continues to meet quarterly and now reports to SQA's Finance and Performance Group and People and Culture Group. We ensure that equality updates, our Equality Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes are presented to SQA's Executive Management Team and Board of Management for approval.

2023 new governance model



Equality governance structure



SQA has embedded equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) expertise throughout its workforce. We appointed an Equality Impact Assessment Manager and Officer in October 2021 to support work to meet the requirements of SQA's Section 23 Agreement with the EHRC. Our new Policy, Analysis and Standards Directorate now has a dedicated Equalities Team, with a specific focus on SQA's products, services, and learners. This team is led by a specialist Head of Equalities, and has been strengthened by the addition of staff with new skills and experience, including our Policy and Research Manager, Anti-Racist Education. We have also appointed an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Manager in HR, and our Corporate Equality Team will be supported by a new Corporate Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Manager. Teams are working collaboratively across the organisation to ensure a cohesive approach to equality mainstreaming.

Procurement processes and award criteria

SQA's procurement process includes clauses to further our equality commitments. We continue to require probity statements from potential suppliers to SQA, including equality policies or statements, when submitting their tenders. Where a supplier directly impacts on our equality duties, assessment of their equality commitments forms a significant part of our contracting criteria.

We continue to promote the Scottish Living Wage, and the Fair Work Framework in employment as part of awarding contracts or frameworks. The fair work framework seeks to further embed equality by rewarding suppliers with good employment practice, including advancing equality. We ensure zero hours contracts are not used by suppliers in the delivery of services, and that suppliers maintain equality and diversity policies that comply with relevant legislation.

In the conduct of our business, we aim to tackle inequalities, and improve life chances for children and young people and families at risk. We hold our suppliers to our 'zero tolerance' approach to slavery and human trafficking. We are committed to taking all reasonably practicable steps to ensure that slavery and human trafficking is not present in our operations, in our supply chains, or amongst third-party representatives working on our behalf.

Responsible business

SQA makes a difference to the communities it serves through a shared understanding and a sense of being a responsible business that delivers and sustains a positive impact on its customers and communities.

As a responsible business, our objectives are to create positive changes and make valuable contributions that support our local communities, environment, customers, and employees.

Our Responsible Business Team look after the operational delivery of SQA's responsible business strategy and associated Giving Something Back Initiatives. SQA staff get involved throughout the year across a variety of activities to 'Give Something Back' to our local communities. Developments have been made to ensure that our community support initiatives fit with the new hybrid working model for colleagues and young people venturing into the world of work.

Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014: corporate parenting

As [a corporate parent](#), SQA 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. We are committed to helping care-experienced young people realise the brighter futures they deserve. And we support Who Cares? Scotland's ambition for a lifetime of equality, love and respect for all care-experienced people in Scotland.

Our Corporate Parenting Plan sets out our commitments to support care-experienced learners, and our Corporate Parenting Steering Group meets quarterly to review these action plans.

Children's rights

SQA's ambition is to become a leading public body in ensuring that children's rights are recognised, as set out in the United Nations Convention on Children's Rights (UNCRC). This will reflect our purpose of helping people to fulfil their potential and achieve their ambitions. In March 2022, we published SQA's first Children's Rights Report 2017–20. Reporting periods should ordinarily be three years, but the timescale for completing the first Children's Rights Report was extended because of the COVID-19 pandemic. An interim Children's Rights Report 2020–22 was also published to accompany our first report. These reports highlight the actions we have taken to support children and young people in Scotland to realise their rights. We will report again in 2023–24.

There is more information on our [Children's Rights Reports web page](#).

Section 2: SQA's Equality Outcomes 2021–25 progress update

Equality Outcome 1

Fair Work Convention

Our commitment to being a fair work employer is outlined in our Corporate Plan 2020–23.

We continue to map all dimensions of the Fair Work Framework to ensure that they are considered in all our internal people initiatives and policies and continue to ensure that we follow the Scottish Government's Fair Work First principles and guidance.

Fair Work First focuses on encouraging and supporting employers to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces and asks employers to commit to adopting the following criteria:

- ◆ appropriate channels for effective voice
- ◆ investment in workforce development
- ◆ no inappropriate use of zero hours contracts
- ◆ action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace
- ◆ payment of the Real Living Wage

In addition, the following criteria were added in October 2021:

- ◆ offer flexible and family-friendly working practices for all workers from day one of employment
- ◆ oppose the use of fire and rehire practice

HR policy review

In 2020, we developed SQA's HR policy review process to modernise all Human Resources (HR) policies and procedures and have continued to make progress. This policy review has been undertaken in consultation with SQA's trade union workplace representatives and with engagement of our Employee Network Groups.

All our HR policies and procedures have now been redrafted, with the majority published (in 2022) on SQA's internal intranet site, which is accessible to all employees. The remainder are on target to be complete by the end of March 2023. Of particular significance to our equality commitments is SQA's revised Dignity at Work policy, which was published early in 2022. This has been supported by a mandatory e-learning module (launched in December 2022) for new employees and new line managers. Mandatory training to support the Dignity at Work policy will be launched throughout 2023.

SQA's revised Recruitment and Selection policy was published in September 2022 and a revised Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy will be published in April 2023. Both revised

policies will be supported by mandatory training which will be developed and implemented during 2023–24.

Equality impact assessments

[Equality impact assessments of SQA HR policies and procedures](#) have been completed and published. As a result of the completed EqlAs, a separate two-year action plan was created in September 2022 to review recommendations to make additional improvements to our HR policies at the next review cycle, and to further embed equality, diversity, and inclusion across SQA.

Collaboration with trade unions

SQA's Joint Engagement Forum (JEF) is the formal process through which SQA, and its recognised trade unions (Unison and Unite) negotiate, consult, and inform one another of high-level issues of mutual interest and concern. Throughout the reporting period the Joint Engagement Forum (JEF) has continued to meet every month.

In addition to the monthly JEF forum, our trade union and HR colleagues meet fortnightly, providing a platform for raising current operational matters of joint interest and to determine any relevant actions and monitor progress.

The Executive Management Team (EMT) also meets with SQA's trade union colleagues, including full time officers, quarterly. This provides a forum to ensure ongoing trade union/leadership engagement and discussion of key strategic organisational matters of mutual interest and concern.

Recruitment advertising

During 2022, SQA reviewed its recruitment advertising priorities. Utilising a partnership with TMP Worldwide, recruitment sites were identified that aligned with Scottish Government guidance and evidenced a good return on investment. Vercida was selected — an organisation that helps employers looking to promote a positive and diverse working environment and individuals looking for jobs in an equal opportunities workplace. It offers an excellent platform to reach all minority groups and promotes SQA vacancies directly via email and social media. Vercida has also supported SQA in creating content to promote SQA as an employer of choice for minority groups.

Following a review of the language used in job adverts in 2022, SQA is now using tools to ensure inclusivity and the removal of any potential bias. This tool is used to review adverts before they are published with a view to appealing to a wider and more diverse applicant market.

Recruitment application forms

The application form we use for all recruitment is currently under review. This follows recommendations made in the [Scottish Government Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit](#), including anonymisation and the removal of characteristic identifiers. Additionally, an

accessibility review of the application form is under way — moving to a mobile platform will allow a wider range of candidates to apply for roles at SQA.

Learning and development

SQA employees can access development opportunities relating to their current role through our Performance Management process 'My Review'. The development opportunities available include self-directed learning, formal learning sessions delivered both internally and externally, and access to accredited qualifications.

The Learning and Development policy was updated in April 2022 to ensure that it reflected changes in the organisation and could accommodate accessibility to learning opportunities in a hybrid working environment. Based on employee feedback, a new criterion of when financial support for accredited qualifications is available, and which qualifications are covered, has been added to ensure transparency around financial decisions based on development need. A one-year apprenticeship programme was also introduced and, for this reason, we have removed the requirement to have been employed by SQA for 12 months before gaining access to financial support.

The Learning and Development Policy now includes explicit provision for access to learning to use adaptive equipment. The request is raised by our HR team, as they are responsible for identifying the equipment required and supporting the reasonable adjustment process for employees. OD and Change Management is responsible for providing training in using the identified adaptation.

Virtual learning

During COVID-19, we offered virtual learning for our development programmes, working with training providers who can deliver digitally. This has continued and underpins a hybrid working environment with opportunity to attend internal courses on a virtual or face-to-face basis. We provide ICT training to support flexible working — all colleagues have access to online or face-to-face training to enable them to use collaboration tools such as MS Teams to support working remotely.

In addition, we ensure that part-time and home-based workers have access to development by scheduling multiple workshops on different days and times of the week. Programmes are blended with online modules, virtual classroom, and guided learning to cover learning styles, accessibility and learning need. Documentation for development programmes has been accessibility-checked.

Values for all

The SQA Values For All Programme supports our 'Trusted, Progressive and Enabling' culture by providing values-based learning opportunities for all colleagues. The programme focuses on increasing self and social awareness and strengthening relationships. It is designed to promote a shared understanding of SQA values in action, ensuring alignment between words and behaviours. It recognises every colleague's personal accountability for embodying those values. The programme is currently offered both as an in-person two-day

programme, and online, as three half-day sessions to ensure maximum flexibility in accessibility.

Line manager programme

SQA's line manager development programme promotes SQA's values and aims to equip line managers with the knowledge, skills, and behaviours they need to help them manage their teams effectively and consistently. The content was reviewed and, based on employee feedback and best practice, the following topics were added to the content to ensure line managers can create safe and inclusive environments:

- ◆ creating a mentally healthy workplace
- ◆ stress awareness
- ◆ cognitive diversity
- ◆ best practice hybrid working
- ◆ autism awareness
- ◆ disability awareness for line managers

Our Organisational Development Team created our autism awareness and disability awareness training in collaboration with our Disability Network.

Induction Programme

SQA's induction programme was updated to reflect inclusivity for new colleagues who were working at home during COVID-19. The virtual element has continued based on feedback from employees. Colleagues agreed our virtual corporate induction gives more opportunity for those who share protected characteristics to access the session.

Following consultation with employee-led networks, an amendment will be made to an introduction exercise. Colleagues in attendance will be invited to share their preferred pronoun during the introductory icebreaker. Originally there was a potential negative impact for some colleagues who may have preferred the opportunity to express their pronouns.

Our autism awareness module was added to the mandatory induction modules following feedback from colleagues and our Disability Network. Around 8% of SQA colleagues currently identify as disabled. This growth highlights the need for additional consideration now and in the future for those who self-identify as having a disability. The following changes were made as a result:

- ◆ during housekeeping colleagues are reminded that they are free to step away from the screen/desk if they need to for comfort reasons
- ◆ the maximum time is 2 hours in acknowledgement of mental fatigue
- ◆ PowerPoint slides are used minimally (approx. 30% of duration) and are sent via e-mail following the session for review
- ◆ SharePoint is used as a resource and is accessibility checked
- ◆ presenter uses their camera and headphones when delivering and promotes the benefits of sharing video for the purpose of engagement — this also enables lip reading for colleagues with hearing difficulties, and use of the pop out function on Microsoft Teams is encouraged to assist colleagues with sight impairment

- ◆ colleagues are invited to advise of any special arrangements that they require ahead of attending 'All About Us' in the welcome e-mail/calendar invite

Mentoring programme

The SQA mentoring programme launched as a long-term development intervention to help someone achieve personal and professional goals. This includes talent development, personal impact, performance, and career goals. Mentoring will be for development and performance, in the organisational context including personal behaviours as displayed in the work environment and behavioural expectations as set out in the demonstration of SQA values and the Leadership Statement.

Part of the programme is a focus on mutual mentoring. Mutual mentoring promotes self-directed learning for diversity and inclusion best practice. Mutual mentoring is a tool to improve organisational practice in supporting underrepresented groups, to provide a platform for effective voice and to contribute to organisational decision making. This will help us build a culture of inclusive action and trust that all colleagues are respected, listened to, and valued.

Talent development mentoring for young talent (under age 25 as defined by Investors in Young People IYYP) was also included as part of the programme. This type of mentoring is being offered only to this age group for two reasons:

- ◆ The IYYP reports have identified that talented young people feel they do not have access to development opportunities, do not have enough information on career pathways and are passed over for promotion due to perceived inexperience. As part of the Young Talent strategy, they will have access to a talent development mentor to identify their own development opportunities, career pathways and skills toolbox, and will be able to use the mentoring relationship to network with others and learn from their career experiences.
- ◆ Feedback from former modern apprentices in the quarterly reviews over the past three years has demonstrated that having access to a mentor who had previously been in their position and understands the challenges would be more helpful than someone who has not had this experience. This would help them identify where they can invest in their own learning and development during their apprenticeship programmes to gain sustainable employment.

Modern Apprentices

We continued the successful Modern Apprenticeships programme supporting six one-year apprentices who completed their programme in January 2022 — four stayed with SQA and progressed to higher-grade roles. We later hired two more Modern Apprentices, who are due to complete in August 2023. We continue to offer SVQ Business and Admin at SCQF level 6 and an HNC in Business, as well as exposure to different business areas and work activities throughout the programme.

We also launched a new internship programme in April 2021. This programme supports our Young Talent route with opportunities to join SQA for placements ranging from six weeks to 12 months in a directorate or specific business area. Placements are suitable for university

and college students in a sandwich year or as a summer placement; and for graduates looking to gain work experience or those just finished education or further education and entering the workplace for the first time.

We work with academic and social responsibility partners to support the programme, including the Robertson Trust, Enable Scotland, Inclusion Scotland, Developing the Young Workforce, and further education institutions. In February and March 2023, we advertised four more Young Talent Business and Administration internships, one of which is in our Corporate Office and supported by the CEO to demonstrate leadership in developing the young workforce.

SQA Young Talent Strategy

We became a member of the Young Person's Guarantee and launched the Young Talent Strategy in November 2021.

The strategy will create opportunities for SQA to source, recruit, develop and retain young talent for three reasons:

- 1 To support the Scottish Government's Young Person's Guarantee initiative.
- 2 To provide work experience to prepare young people for the world of work with additional opportunities for young people with barriers to work such as a vocational apprentice programme with no entry requirements and additional internship opportunities with no academic entry requirements.
- 3 To ensure no young person is left behind in the economic recovery and impact of COVID-19. This specifically includes disabled young people and care-experienced young people, and drives our decision to work with partner agencies such as the Robertson Trust, Inclusion Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland in providing internships, work experience and apprentice opportunities. We use the strategy to advance opportunities for young disabled people and young care-experienced people to join the organisation.

SQA's young talent

Talented young people, defined as under the age of 24 by Investors in Young People (IYIP), play an important role in SQA.

- ◆ They represent the views of a significant population of learners who take our qualifications.
- ◆ They are familiar with, and inspired by, lifelong learning to build their knowledge and career.
- ◆ They bring a fresh perspective to increase innovation and continuous improvement.

SQA is committed to ensuring its existing young talent have the skills, knowledge, and behaviours to help transition to a new organisation ready to embrace the changes in the education sector and understand the learner at the heart of it.

We also continue to attract new young talent in our development programmes including our new 12-month internships and our collaboration with [Career Ready](#) to host and mentor senior phase interns.



People Strategy

SQA's People Strategy was launched in June 2021. Over 150 colleagues participated in focus groups to help create the strategy, which aims to strengthen our foundations, build our capability, and advance our business, ensuring that our people are at the heart of everything that we do.

The four main interlinking themes of the strategy are:

- ◆ develop our organisation design and culture
- ◆ improve health, wellbeing, and the environment
- ◆ improve our performance
- ◆ be a responsible business

SQA's People Directorate's annual operational objectives are mapped to the People Strategy. One of the key elements in developing our organisation design and culture is the

design and implementation of a comprehensive Diversity and Inclusion Strategy aligned to our equality outcomes. This work will commence in early 2023.

People Survey

SQA's People Survey ran throughout October 2022. The survey is carried out every year to measure engagement and progress against our people action plans. The results show that the headline engagement score is 73%, an increase of 4% since the 2021 survey.

The survey showed that:

- ◆ 96% of colleagues indicated they felt they have the skills to do their job effectively, and 88% indicated they have had a development conversation with their line manager in the past 12 months.
- ◆ 89% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I am treated fairly at work'
- ◆ 84% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I think that SQA respects individual differences (such as cultures, working styles, backgrounds, ideas, etc)
- ◆ 86% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I achieve a good balance between my work life and private life'.
- ◆ 78% of respondents agreed with the statement 'SQA is committed to creating a diverse and inclusive workplace'.
- ◆ 89% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I am treated with respect by the people I work with'.

The highest-scoring responses included:

- ◆ I have the skills to do my job effectively (96%)
- ◆ I am trusted to carry out my job effectively (94%)
- ◆ I am interested in my work (91%)

The most-improved responses included:

- ◆ I am proud when I tell others I am part of SQA (+7%)
- ◆ There are opportunities for me to develop my career in SQA (+5%)

The lowest-scoring responses included:

- ◆ Poor performance is dealt with effectively in my team (44%)
- ◆ Where I work, I think effective action has been taken on the results of the last survey (40%)

The overall response rate for the survey decreased from 82% to 72%. This is something we will work to understand and address for future surveys.

SQA Directors and Heads of Service meet with teams across the organisation to discuss the results of the People Survey, looking at how we celebrate the strengths and share ideas on how we can make improvements.

Succession planning

Succession planning in SQA allows the organisation to manage risk for our critical roles as well as ensuring our organisation is led successfully into the future. The heart of this development conversation between an individual and their manager covers business need and the individual's aspirations, capability, and development. It therefore contributes to employee engagement, career progression and more focused development conversations.

Race at Work Charter and Action Plan

Since we signed up to the Race at Work Charter in 2020, work has continued on the development of a race equality action plan to support and increase the diversity of our workforce. This includes the [work on recruitment outlined above](#).

In 2021, Business in the Community (BITC) expanded the Race at Work Charter to include two new commitments as follows:

- ◆ providing support for inclusion allies to promote race equality in teams, at work and within communities
- ◆ ensuring black-owned businesses and enterprises are part of supply chains, monitoring timely payment and contract value

We have recently signed up to the extended charter. The actions associated with this will be incorporated into the existing race equality action plan.

Disability Confident Leader

During 2022, as part of our equality action plan to meet Equality Outcome 1 'to have an increasingly diverse workforce that fully embraces equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do', our Disability Network, HR and Organisational Development colleagues worked towards becoming a Disability Confident Leader – level 3. We were delighted to receive notification in October 2022 that we had been successful. Having achieved level 3, we will now be working to ensure we meet our commitments as a Disability Confident Leader.



Carer-positive employer

We made a commitment as part of our Equality Outcomes for 2021–25, to become a carer-positive employer. Following our initial meeting with Carer Positive, we were pleased to learn that we were already well on our way to achieving engaged-level accreditation because of existing practices in the organisation such as our ‘happy to talk flexible working’ accreditation, the Employee Assistance Programme and our Parent and Carers Network. We continued to work towards accreditation during the early part of 2022, including testimonials from carers within the organisation in support of our application and were pleased to be awarded Carer Positive accreditation in May 2022.

It is our intention to progress further as a carer positive employer and this will continue to form part of our equality action plan going forward.



Big congratulations to the Scottish Qualifications Authority who have now become recognised as a #CarerPositive employer! Well done on all of your hard work in creating a supportive workplace for carers. 🌟

@sqanews



Employee network groups

SQA’s employee network groups provide colleagues with an opportunity to come together to share their experiences and ideas, offer peer support and guidance. Networks also provide a forum for consultation with employees to help inform policy development.

We are pleased to have five Employee Networks in SQA:

- ◆ ACE (Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity) Network
- ◆ Disability Network
- ◆ Rainbow Network
- ◆ Women’s Network
- ◆ Young Talent Network

During the pandemic, colleagues also formed a Parents and Carers Network to support one another, and the group continue to engage on Yammer. Our networks are critical to building a sense of belonging and offering constructive challenge as we strive to do more.

Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity (ACE)

Our ACE Network continue to meet every month. The network has been very active during 2021–23 raising awareness and promoting key events and important issues. Its campaigns have included:

- ◆ Celebration of Race Equality Week in 2021, 2022 and 2023
- ◆ Mother's Day Cultural Celebrations
- ◆ Black History Month 2021 & 2022
- ◆ International Day of Indigenous People
- ◆ #MyNamels Campaign
- ◆ Black History in Scotland
- ◆ South Asian Heritage Month

Disability Network

SQA's Disability Network continues to provide a welcoming, confidential, and safe environment for colleagues to share ideas and information on disability equality in the workplace.

Each year members support UK Disability History Month — an annual event that provides a platform to raise awareness and promote awareness of disability. Members organise events and publish articles on our internal intranet site throughout Disability History Month.

SQA's Disability Network's campaigns during 2021-23 have included:

- ◆ Disability History Month
- ◆ Disability Network Lunch and Learn sessions with the Royal National Institute of Blind People to provide tips and guidance on to look after your eyes, and the impact sight loss can have on a person's life
- ◆ Men's Health Week
- ◆ Deaf Awareness Week
- ◆ Neurodiversity Celebration Week
- ◆ Dyslexia Awareness Month
- ◆ Cystic Fibrosis Awareness Campaign

Rainbow Network

SQA's Rainbow Network offers a safe and welcoming space for LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies. The Rainbow Network encourages SQA to be a workplace that promotes, embraces, and welcomes LGBTQ+ diversity, dignity, inclusion, and talents. During 2021–23, our Rainbow Network organised several events and awareness-raising campaigns.

Highlights include:

- ◆ LGBTQ+ History Month celebrations and promotion of the online library
- ◆ Pride Month 2021
- ◆ 50 Years of Pride in 2022 and internal online quizzes throughout Pride month
- ◆ First Drag Day/Drag Brunch 2021
- ◆ IDAHOBIT

- ◆ International Asexuality Day
- ◆ International Pronouns Day
- ◆ Lesbian Visibility Week
- ◆ Trans Day of Visibility

In July 2022 the network held its 2nd Annual Drag Brunch, where guests formed part of the Gender Recognition Act Reform Panel and music was provided from the Spotify Rainbow Network Pride mix. Fiona Robertson, SQA's Chief Executive and Michael Baxter, Director of Finance and Corporate Services both spoke at the event.

Women's Network

Our Women's Network continues to provide a welcoming space for women across the organisation. The Network offers Women in SQA the opportunity to get to know one another, offer peer support and to support SQA policy developments in areas of equality and inclusion. On International Women's Day, our latest blog comes from the new Chairperson of the SQA Women's Network, Nicola Rathmill, who shares her thoughts on gender equality.

Each year members support International Women's Day to celebrate women's achievements, educate and raise awareness for women's equality and to call for positive change advancing women. The 2023 global campaign was #EmbraceEquity and our Network focussed on challenging gender stereotypes, calling out discrimination, drawing attention to bias and seeking out inclusion. In the lead up to IWD 2023 members published daily articles to share what #EmbraceEquity means to them.

On International Women's Day 2023, our new Women's Network Chair also shared a [blog about her thoughts on gender equality](#).



Young Talent Network

SQA's Young Talent Network gives colleagues aged 16–24 a platform where they will be heard, recognised and supported to influence change and ensure SQA fulfils its commitment to developing all of the young workforce.

The network will support our young people to become more confident, improve job satisfaction, and increase skills and abilities by taking on internal and external opportunities. Alongside this, giving our young people the chance to grow their connections with colleagues across the organisation.

Herald and GenAnalytics Diversity Awards

In October 2022, we sponsored the Diversity through Education award at the [Herald and GenAnalytics Diversity Awards 2022](#). Our Research and Policy Manager, Anti-Racist Education, Monica Medina, hosted SQA's table at the event, and presented the award to the winner, [Uteach Ltd — Scottish Online Lessons](#).

Uteach provide a way for learners and teachers to access learning and teaching resources online. The service covers subjects in the Scottish primary and secondary school curriculum, making learning accessible for so many.



Monica Medina, SQA Policy and Research Manager Anti-Racist Education, presenting the Diversity through Education Award to Uteach.

Payment of the real living wage

SQA continues to ensure at least payment of the real living wage to all employees — our current lowest rate sits above the real living wage. We continue to ensure payment of the real living wage to appointees and any temporary agency workers. In addition, as part of our procurement and tendering process, we ensure that all contractors who employ staff directly pay the real living wage and ensure timely implementation of any increase to the real living wage, with the most recent change being implemented earlier than usual in November 2022, to reflect the rising cost of living.

Employee monitoring data collection and analysis

As outlined in our last Equality Mainstreaming Report, we adopted updated equality and diversity categorisations for protected characteristics in preparation for our move to a new HR system in April 2019. As such, we were unable to draw comparisons between the data in

the 2019–21 report and the 2017–19 report. However, as part of the 2021–23 report, we are now able to compare information with the 2019–21 report to identify trends more accurately.

The completion rate for equality and diversity data remains high at 88.30%. We continue to encourage colleagues to update their equality data on an ad hoc basis and it continues to be our aim to reduce the number of colleagues selecting 'prefer not to say'.

In 2022, we developed an improved workforce equality monitoring template to improve the reporting and analysis of data gathered across all protected characteristics. As part of our drive to continually improve the collection and analysis of equality data and ensure we continue to follow best practice, during 2021 we carried out a further review of the equality and diversity categorisations for protected characteristics for colleagues and applicants. We originally intended to compare this against the 2021 census categorisations with a view to aligning (where appropriate) with the census to enable more effective external benchmarking. However, due to COVID-19, the Scottish census was delayed until 2022. This work was therefore revisited in the latter part of 2022, and it is planned to engage with relevant internal stakeholders including trade union colleagues in early 2023 to discuss and agree any proposed changes to align with the census.

Once the work on data categorisations is complete, we intend to run a further campaign in 2023–24 to raise awareness of the importance of providing this data, using real examples of how it is used in the development of our policies, equality impact assessments and equality action plans.

To increase data reporting and provide greater insight against our organisational deliverable to 'Ensure SQA has a diverse and engaged workforce', it is planned to include organisational colleague data against the protected characteristics within our quarterly performance review pack from January 2023 onwards. This will allow the information to be presented to SQA's Performance Committee.

The detailed analysis of our workforce composition can be found in SQA's Workforce Equality Monitoring Report, which you can access from [our equality outcomes, reports and policies web page](#).

Equal pay audit and action to tackle the gender pay gap

SQA continues to conduct an annual equal pay audit and analysis to identify any action required. This includes analysis of occupational segregation data. In 2022, our gender pay gap was 5.6% (based on the average hourly male and female salary), a 0.58% decrease from 2021. In 2023, our gender pay gap was 5.3%, a decrease of 0.3% from 2022.

As part of SQA's 2021–22 pay remit, we made further improvements to maternity/adoption and shared parental pay. In addition, we continued to apply measures in line with Scottish Government Pay Policy to ensure the highest increases are given to our lower paid colleagues.

Any changes to pay and terms and conditions of employment are subject to Public Sector Pay Policy, affordability, Scottish Government approval and Trade Union agreement. SQA's equal pay audit is published on our website.

Equality Outcome 2

SQA's Policy, Analysis and Standards (PAS) Directorate formed a dedicated Equalities Team in 2022 with a specific focus on SQA's products, services, and learners. This team is led by a specialist Head of Equalities, and has been strengthened by the addition of staff with new skills and experience. This includes the appointment of SQA's Policy and Research Manager, Anti-Racist Education.

SQA's PAS Equalities Team provide support, resources, and guidance to colleagues on equality, diversity and inclusion matters in qualifications and assessment. The team also leads on the commitments set out in SQA's equality outcomes (Equality Outcome 2) to ensure that these responsibilities are linked to other areas of work and that progress is recorded. The team works closely with SQA's Corporate Equality Team in Strategic Planning and Governance, to support colleagues across the organisation.

Equality and inclusion in qualifications design, assessment and quality assurance

SQA's policy Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications sets out our commitment to ensure that equality is placed at the heart of our work in qualification design, assessment, and quality assurance.

The policy supports equality of access to qualifications for candidates from all equality groups. It reflects the requirements of the Equality Act (2010) and SQA's wider public equality duties for promoting equality, eliminating discrimination, and seeking to achieve equity for all learners. The policy is linked to SQA's Governing Principle 7: SQA must 'ensure that all of its qualifications and assessments are as fair and accessible as possible.'

There are four strategic areas of work where the policy is put into practice. They are:

- ◆ equality review of SQA qualifications
- ◆ provision of support, effective guidance and training on inclusive design for those involved in the development of assessment materials
- ◆ provision of assessment arrangements for disabled candidates and/or those identified as having additional support needs
- ◆ quality assurance of centres' systems for the provision of assessment arrangements in SQA internal and external assessments

We have reviewed activity against these key strategic areas of work and provided a report on progress.

Equality review of SQA qualifications

The Equality Act (2010) places clear duties on SQA not to discriminate against people who wish to be, or who are, learners for SQA's qualifications because of their protected characteristic (disability, race, age, religion or belief, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity or sexual orientation).

To meet these duties, SQA monitors its qualifications for any aspect that could disadvantage any candidate with protected characteristics through the Equality Review of Qualifications process for all National Qualifications. This ensures that there is robust and transparent consideration of equalities during development and ongoing maintenance of qualifications. Consideration of any negative and/or positive impacts on candidates with protected characteristics is recorded by Qualifications Development staff on an Equality Review Form (ERF) for each qualification. Qualifications Development staff carried out this review and updated the ERFs, reflecting the impact of the changes made to qualifications between 2020 and 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the change in staff since the implementation of this process, SQA's Policy Analysis and Standards, Equalities Team, has identified an excellent opportunity to review this process in line with the Hayward Review and offer refreshed training to colleagues.

As a result of an internal review of this process, we identified several improvements that we will make to when SQA appointees are involved at each stage, when each stage takes place, and what guidance documents are used to support Qualifications Development and SQA appointees' considerations.

We are taking every opportunity to gather all information available to Qualifications Development colleagues, including those from the Assessment Development and Delivery: NQ (National Qualifications) Assessment business area, to map out the Equality Review of Qualifications process in its entirety with a timeline of when work takes place. This will allow us to identify opportunities to better support our Qualifications Development colleagues by regularly reviewing and updating relevant guidance documentation on a cyclical basis and to introduce targeted training to build on staff confidence and awareness of equality.

Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications Policy Review

SQA's Policy Research and Standards team in the Policy, Analysis and Standards (PAS) Directorate is responsible for the maintenance of Qualifications Development policies. In 2022, we developed a programme for the review of all Qualifications Development policies to ensure they were up to date and to align them more fully with SQA's Code of Practice and Governing Principles.

The Equality of Access to SQA Qualifications policy has been comprehensively reviewed in discussion with a Short Life Working Group of SQA staff. SQA's Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group (which consists of a range of external stakeholders) was also invited to provide their feedback. As a result of the review the overall purpose and position of the policy remains. However, the following aspects have been updated:

- ◆ Detail has been added to the policy on the legislative context to specify which qualifications are covered under which parts of the Equality Act (2010).
- ◆ Additional information has been added on the principles of assessment arrangements and on the process for considering reasonable adjustments.
- ◆ Further information has been included on the guidance that is relevant to this policy. This provides a clear 'line of sight' between the policy and guidance: the policy lays out the position and the guidance demonstrates how SQA (and centres) implement it.
- ◆ The link between the policy and SQA Governing Principle 7 is more explicit than previously.

Following approval of the policy, there is now a requirement to review, and refresh existing guidance (for instance, on assessment arrangements) for SQA staff and for centres.

Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) for exam diet and contingencies in 2022

The PAS Equalities Team completed several Equalities Impact Assessments (EqIAs) and Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs), working with colleagues across SQA, on elements of the arrangements around assessment of NQs (National Qualifications) in 2022. We also completed several impact assessments on the various contingency arrangements. These are:

Scenario 2 (SQA exam diet with course modifications and additional support measures for learners)

- Communication (all learners)
- Course modifications (all learners)
- Assessment arrangements (individual learners)
- Additional support for learners (all learners)
- Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) (individual learners)
- Awarding and grade boundaries (all learners)
- Appeals (exam model) (individual learners)
- EECCS contingency arrangement (sampling) (individual learners)

Scenario 3 (SQA exams cancelled; provisional results determined by teachers and lecturers)

- Scenario 3 overview (including provisional results)
- Quality Assurance national exercise
- Incomplete evidence contingency arrangement
- Scenario 3 appeals (exams cancelled)

We produced EqIAs and CRWIAs for each process as these were developed, agreed and approved. Impact Assessments were presented to SQA’s Code of Practice Governance Group (CoPGG) for approval and updated on the [Equality Impact Assessment](#) and [Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment](#) documents, which are published on SQA’s website.

Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be felt in the education sector in Scotland during the 2021–22 academic year, and had significant implications for assessment and qualifications. Our PAS Equalities Team has considered the potential impact of each part of arrangements around the 2022 exam diet on learners who share protected characteristics to understand — and attempt to reduce — some of the adverse impacts.

The completion of CRWIAs for arrangements around the 2022 diet is a first step to taking a children’s-rights-based approach in decision making across the organisation. SQA is

committed to ensuring the integration of considerations of children's rights in all key aspects of organisational core business.

SQA Equality and Inclusion Key Partners Group

SQA's Equality and Inclusion Key Partners' Group continues to provide a strategic forum for external stakeholders to provide advice on issues of equality and inclusion in qualifications development. The group met in October 2021 and again in April 2022.

Provision of support, guidance, and training on inclusive design for development of assessment

Designing inclusive assessment training course

SQA staff and appointees are encouraged to complete the SQA Academy course on Designing Inclusive Assessments. This full and detailed course provides guidance, with exemplars, on how to design and write assessment materials to be as accessible as possible.

A comprehensive review of the course content is underway, to ensure it remains up-to-date and is fit for purpose. We are also considering how to ensure that SQA Qualifications Development staff and appointees engage with this course and apply the guidance to their question papers and assessment materials.

The course has a section on the use of gender-neutral language, and we are updating this in line with a recently-completed SQA position paper, which outlines the rationale for promoting the use of gender-neutral language and provides some clear guidance. As an inclusive organisation, we want to be sure we are accessible and equitable for all learners, including those who belong to the LGBTQ+ community. This should also be reflected, as much as possible, in our assessment materials, question papers and published research. The position paper outlines how this can be addressed in various circumstances.

To inform this work we worked with Qualifications Development colleagues in Modern Languages and Gàidhlig to examine how some modern languages which use gendered vocabulary could extend to inclusive gender recognition in various languages of study. As concepts of gender are slowly being recognised across the globe, experts have produced ways to remain neutral within grammatical and cultural contexts. We will keep abreast of how language is evolving to ensure Scottish learners remain current on linguistic developments.

We have also worked with Qualifications Development colleagues in Drama to research best practice for learners in the LGBTQ+ community and those who use sign language who wish to take on an acting role for the Performance component. Qualifications Development colleagues in Drama scheduled a meeting in September with the Royal Conservatoire Scotland to understand their best practice in ensuring that their qualifications are as equitable and inclusive as possible. Meetings were also scheduled between Qualifications Development colleagues and a centre representative regarding the process used by one sign interpreter to support their Drama cohort using sign guidance created by the centre.

Further discussions are to be held between Qualifications Development colleagues and our PAS Equalities Team to identify actions to be taken forward internally, including a suggested review of SQA's quality assurance process for visiting examining components to ensure that this assessment process is objective and free from bias. The potential to produce guidance on non-verbal cues or instructions that learners using sign could follow in further and higher education was also discussed.

Race Equality and Anti-racism in Education Programme

In response to significant correspondence to the Depute First Minister from the public following the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, the [Race Equality and Anti-Racism in Education Programme](#) was created by the Scottish Government (SG) in 2021. Educators, pupils, and parents were explicitly demanding a stronger response to racial inequalities that still exist within Scottish education. There were calls to eradicate racist incidents as well as to include Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic histories. The programme is made up of four subgroups:

- ◆ curricular reform
- ◆ racism and racist incidents
- ◆ diversity in the teaching profession and education workforce
- ◆ education leadership and professional learning

As a major organisation in the Scottish education system, SQA was an integral part of this programme. Appointing a member of staff with experience in this area not only supports facilitation of the work required, but also provides a demonstration of SQA's commitment to developing anti-racist approaches in assessment and qualifications.

Anti-Racist Education Plan

In May 2022, an external consultant reviewed SQA's capacity for implementing race equality in its qualifications and assessments and submitted a report of findings in late August 2022. Based on this report, we developed an Anti-racist Education plan that acknowledges that other directorates will contribute to the overall effectiveness, but focuses on how the PAS and Qualifications Directorates can ensure our qualifications 'products' fulfil the general and Scottish specific duties of the Equality Act 2010 and SQA Corporate Plan Outcomes.

Most importantly the Anti-racist Education plan is a highly effective reflection of SQA's values: Trusted, Enabling and Progressive. Embarking on this work is a major step towards 'challenging the status quo and embracing new ideas and ways of working.'

One of the major components of the plan is to build capacity within the organisation and particularly amongst Qualifications Development staff. As first steps to growing expertise in race awareness, three members of staff were involved in Education Scotland's [Building Racial Literacy Programme](#). This programme allows individuals to develop their understanding of race and racism as well as build networks across the national education system. Partner organisations are represented.

Steps have been taken to raise awareness so that staff understand our position. In the past six months there have been three staff information programmes to discuss the importance and understanding of anti-racist education. There is also an intranet page with a variety of

resources available to staff, and there is a standing item on racial literacy at PAS directorate meetings. These inputs offer opportunities for staff to increase their understanding of race and racism so conversations about race are more confidently addressed. With the endorsement of the Anti-racist Education Plan, a member of the executive management team has come forward to drive the work.

There has also been movement within the curriculum areas:

- ◆ History has released a survey to teachers/lectures to explore how we can make the Higher qualification more inclusive. Additionally, modifications on marking instructions are being reviewed to support variety of perspectives.
- ◆ In Course Reports, English staff are highlighting the variety of texts currently being studied in schools, especially those which embrace the representation of Black and Minority Ethnic characters and/or speak about race and racism. In light of the pending reform of qualifications, the English team are looking for all opportunities to support anti-racism in education.

Provision of assessment arrangements for disabled candidates

Supporting centres, parents and learners

We continue to promote and provide assessment arrangements, including assistive technologies for disabled candidates to improve access to SQA qualifications. We work in close partnership with centres, and disability stakeholder groups, to identify and deliver appropriate assessment arrangements for the candidates who need them.

We continue to consider requests for reasonable adjustments on a case-by-case basis, based on individual need. For example, for a physically disabled candidate where the external exam is, in itself, the barrier, we have been able, through conversations with centre staff, to offer an exceptional circumstances route to certification.

Support for assessment arrangements continued in the last year through dialogue with centres and other stakeholders in relation to specific candidates, or through targeted webinars to discuss general issues. We continue to review and update our guidance documents — these are available on our website — and continue to promote the AA (Assessment Arrangements) toolkit to support centres with identifying and verifying appropriate assessment arrangements.

We published an SQA Academy Course on Assessment Arrangements in October 2021. This course has been designed to build confidence in centre staff to make good decisions in requesting assessment arrangements. To date, 203 people have completed the course and the overall feedback has been positive.

We continue to work with colleagues in the Assessment Arrangements Team to streamline the referral of complex enquiries to PAS Equalities and Qualifications Development colleagues for consideration. Supporting documents, including an enquiry checklist and process map, were created to support colleagues in this work. These resources build colleagues' confidence and awareness of key considerations and information needed from centres for consideration of requests for reasonable adjustments for disabled candidates.

Partnership work with CALL Scotland

We continue to work with Communication, Access, Literacy and Learning (CALL) Scotland (part of the University of Edinburgh's Moray House School of Education) to understand developments in the range of available assistive technologies that can be used to support learners and can be incorporated into assessment arrangements. CALL Scotland works as both a research and development centre and a working service unit to help children and young people across Scotland to overcome disability and barriers to learning created by their environment, and to fulfil their potential. SQA funds CALL's development work around our digital question papers.

The landscape of using ICT (Information and Communication Technology) in exams and assessments is increasingly complex, due to the range of devices used (including Windows devices, iPads and Chromebooks) and the apps available, some of which require an internet connection to operate. A short-life working group has been established to review SQA's position on exam ICT security (which prohibits internet access during the exam) and partnership work with CALL Scotland. The aim is to investigate whether restricted access to the internet and/or cloud-based applications may be possible in external exams. This work is ongoing, and we continue to ensure we are aware of emerging assistive technologies that may be considered. We are liaising with other UK awarding bodies to understand their policies and practices around internet-enabled devices.

We issued a survey to centres in March 2022 to understand how ICT devices are being used as an assessment arrangement in teaching and learning and in assessments. The survey closed in June, and we carried out a full quantitative and qualitative analysis. Once the data analysis has been completed, we will produce a report to document our findings and to identify any actions we need to take. We may issue a further survey to centres to understand how ICT devices are being used by all candidates who are entered for National Qualifications.

Assessment arrangements data 2022

We usually analyse assessment arrangement request data annually. 2022 was the first diet of exams for which we were able to do this since 2019, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that the data entered on SQA's Assessment Arrangements Request (AAR) system is submitted by centres on behalf of candidates. Centres are asked to check and confirm that the difficulty codes used and assessment arrangements requested for each candidate are accurate. Due to the volume of requests and number of candidates affected, it is not possible for us to verify the accuracy of this data directly with candidates in any way. However, the data is useful to allow us to identify any trends and patterns in the types of assessment arrangements requested, to monitor the increase in the number of requests being submitted, the most frequently-requested assessment arrangements, the reasons for them (in terms of broad categories of difficulty) and the patterns of use of distinct types of arrangements. The data also allows us to consider whether further investigation into support for specific difficulties is required, and to be aware of any other equality considerations about our assessment arrangements approach.

Overall, there has been a steady increase in the number of assessment arrangements requests year-on-year.

Despite not having exam diets in 2020 and 2021, the increase suggests that had exams been held in 2020 and 2021, this would accurately reflect the steady incremental increase in the number of learners who are identified as disabled or having an additional support need, who require assessment arrangements in assessments.

Quality assurance of centres' systems for the provision of assessment arrangements

We have a responsibility to ensure that the process of assessment is rigorous and fair for all candidates. For this reason, we must ensure that any assessment arrangements requested are appropriate, and are provided only to those disabled candidates and/or those with additional support needs who are eligible.

We require that all centres have an effective and robust internal quality assurance system for identifying and verifying candidates' eligibility for assessment arrangements. The focus of our quality assurance activity is on helping centres to ensure that they understand our requirements and are confident in implementing them.

In 2020–21, a professional dialogue approach was taken as an alternative to our previous in-person, on-site audit visits. This dialogue included providing advice and guidance on the requirements for assessment arrangements and auditing, and a discussion of the system in place in the centre. This approach has been successfully implemented and well received by centres. It helps to ensure that the devolved responsibility to make provisions for assessment arrangements continues to benefit those candidates who need them.

Learning for sustainability

International and national sustainability policy has grown through the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), adopted by the UK, and specifically by the Scottish Government, in 2015. The agenda aims to address global challenges spanning social issues, health, inequality, education, the economy, the environment, infrastructure, peace and justice, climate, and energy. In response, the Scottish Government committed to the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) by embedding them within its [National Performance Framework](#) setting out the vision, targets, and strategies towards achieving sustainable development. Social, economic, and environmental sustainability is at the core of all Scottish Government policy.

Learning for Sustainability (LFS) in Scotland was outlined in the [Vision 2030+](#) report, which introduced learners' entitlement to LFS. This is the Scottish Government's strategic national approach for schools (3–18 curriculum) as outlined in the [Learning for Sustainability \(LFS\) Action Plan](#) (2019). Through this LFS Action Plan, SQA is mandated to identifying opportunities for developing the values, skills, knowledge and understanding of LFS within all new and revised qualifications through Recommendation 14, Vision 2030+.

Our progress to date

Policy development

- ◆ Based on internal work undertaken by colleagues, a new dedicated temporary post to enable LFS to progress generally and support the NG: HN pilot was created in June 2022.

- ◆ The Scottish Government LfS Action Plan is currently being refreshed, with SQA as a key partner.
- ◆ SQA is on the LfS Leadership Group, which is collectively leading on the refreshed Action Plan, and publication of the new plan due in April 2023.
- ◆ SQA has contributed to ensuring that sustainability is embedded into the educational reform policy including the Hayward Review of qualifications and assessment.

Embedding LfS into qualifications and assessments

Within SQA, the first steps towards integrating sustainability into learning have taken place:

- ◆ As part of the NextGen: HN pilot programme (Strand 17), a mandatory LfS outcome is part of the Year 2 Phase 2 Design Principles put in place for HND level in October 2022.
- ◆ Guidance, support, and workshops have been provided for SQA colleagues and partners to support them to embed LfS into Next Gen: HN programme.
- ◆ Progress is now being made to embed this into the HNC retrospectively. This is to ensure that all NextGen: HN learners will exit their studies with:
 - an understanding of sustainability in general
 - a good grounding in subject-specific sustainability
 - the confidence to apply the knowledge, skills, and values developed through their learning in the next stage of their lives.

Relationship building and partnership working

- ◆ Relationship building, and partnership working with a broad range of stakeholders and agencies in the sustainable development and education space (including learner focus and voice), has been a key theme to date.
- ◆ SQA now sits as a member on [The Learning for Sustainability Scotland Steering Group](#) Scotland's Regional Centre of Expertise on Education (RCE) for Sustainable Development – acknowledged by the United Nations University.

Future activity

- ◆ The Scottish Government has set an ambitious target to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2045. The transition to a low-carbon and net-zero economy will reshape how the economy and society work, and the emphasis is on a [Just Transition](#) so that no-one is left behind. SQA has recently become involved in the [Climate Emergency Skills Action Plan](#) Implementation Group and Education SubGroup to play a role in ensuring that skills development and education helps with the need to create green/ greener jobs and develop green skills to take forward the net-zero transition in Scotland.
- ◆ External stakeholders have very much welcomed SQA dedicating resource to the development of sustainability and climate change learning and education. The development of partnership working has clearly highlighted the opportunities open to SQA to play a key and influential role in supporting LfS and this will continue in the future.
- ◆ More LfS guidance, support, case studies and modules to be developed to further support SQA colleagues and partners.

Equality Outcome 3

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit to accredit and quality assure qualifications in Scotland, thereby safeguarding the interests of learners, employers, parents, funding bodies, providers, and the Scottish Government. It does this by independently approving and regulating awarding bodies operating in Scotland and accrediting their qualifications, which include Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQs), Regulatory and Licensing Qualifications, and other competence-based qualifications.

SQA Accreditation has a statutory remit to accredit any type of qualification other than university degrees. It is accountable to an Accreditation Committee, which is a statutory committee established by the Education (Scotland) Act 1996 and reports directly to Ministers.

SQA Accreditation continues to review the work of awarding bodies and their approved providers in relation to the use of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to ensure that the policy and processes do not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics.

Through awarding body audits and provider monitoring visits, SQA Accreditation has been monitoring the use of digital technology relating to online assessment and remote invigilation. To date, no equality issues have been identified. However, we have seen a small number of awarding bodies returning to face-to-face examinations in place of online assessment. Most awarding bodies that adopted online assessment and remote invigilation during the first lockdown during the pandemic have continued with its use but are also offering face to face examinations.

National Occupations Standards (NOS) are quality assured by SQA Accreditation, primarily to ensure that the NOS are capable of being assessed within qualifications. As part of the quality assurance process, SQA Accreditation is also reviewing the NOS to ensure that there are no terms which relate to a specific gender. This work also considers the qualification products that are developed using NOS to ensure that the unit titles do not include terms relating to a specific gender. No instances have been found at this stage.

As part of our awarding body audits and provider monitoring visits, SQA Accreditation continues to review equal opportunity policies. At this stage all policies developed by awarding bodies are acceptable. However, SQA Accreditation has found issues with some of the policies developed by providers and have raised this as an issue for the relevant awarding bodies. The most common issue found is that providers are not correctly listing all of the protected characteristics.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Summary of workforce information

Employment monitoring data is critical to understanding SQA's workforce composition and identifying any potential barriers to attracting, recruiting, developing, and retaining people from a diverse range of backgrounds. It provides evidence to help inform and progress our work to fully embrace equality, diversity, and inclusion in all that we do.




During this two-year reporting period the overall response rate for colleague equality data remains high at 89.98% in 2021 and 88.30% in 2022 with very little change in our colleague demographic.

During 2022 we began work to revise our equality data monitoring categories to bring them more in line with the categories used in the 2022 Scottish Census. Proposals for changes have been reviewed by our Employee Network Groups and will be reviewed by internal governance groups and trade union representatives. In 2023-24 we intend to make updates to our Human Resource Information Systems used to collect equality data and plan to run a data equality monitoring campaign to encourage colleagues to update their data to target areas with lower disclosure rates.

The figures below provide a high-level summary of information as at 30 November 2022. The detailed analysis of our workforce composition can be found in the full Workforce Equality Monitoring Report.

Age

The table below shows the comparison between SQA colleagues in different age groups and the Scottish working population (those aged 16 to 74).

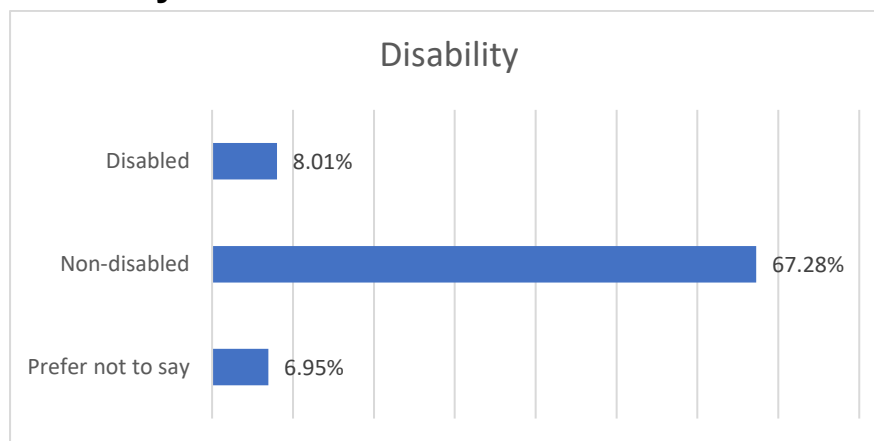
 Age	 SQA	 Population of Scotland ¹
16-24	3.47%	10.18%
25-29	10.14%	6.77%
30-39	23.07%	13.56%
40-49	26.45%	12.24%
50-59	23.94%	14.44%
60-64	9.85%	6.58%
65+	3.09%	10.87%

¹ Scottish population figures on age from Scottish Government Equality data: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/population/population-estimates/mid-year-population-estimates/mid-2021> (Last updated: July 2022, NRS).

The percentage of colleagues in the 16–24 age group is lower than the Scottish working population, where a significant proportion of this age group will be in education or training. SQA is working to attract younger workers by offering:

- ◆ Intern opportunities for young people aged between 16–24 and up to 29 if an individual has a disability and/or is care experienced.
- ◆ The Career Ready Mentoring Programme, which connects young people aged 15–18 with mentors within the organisation.
- ◆ Our Young Talent Network — an internal employee 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 around employability skills.

Disability



32% of the adult population in Scotland are disabled.

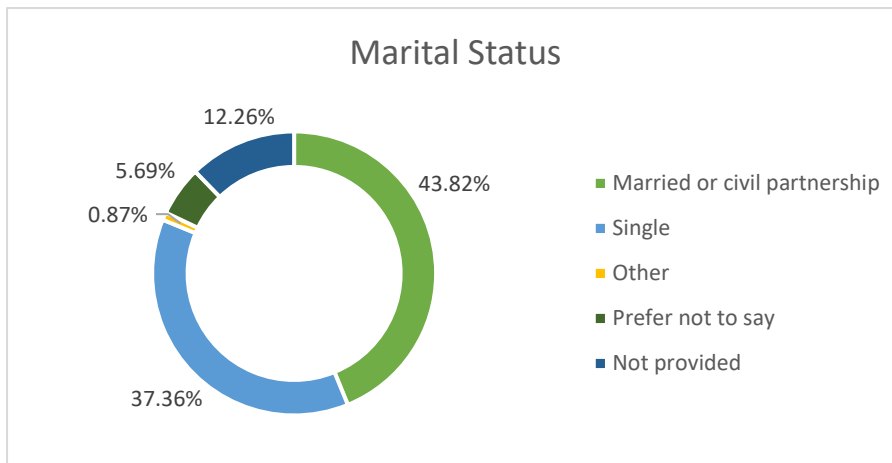
Disclosing disability information is voluntary and, as at 30 November 2022, 82.24% of colleagues had completed information in relation to this protected characteristic.

The percentage of colleagues who have reported a disability has decreased slightly by 1.75% since 2020. We believe the decrease in those declaring a disability is mainly due to a change in the composition of the workforce.

SQA is a Disability Confident Leader and all candidates who apply under the Disability Confident scheme and meet the minimum requirements will be invited to interview.

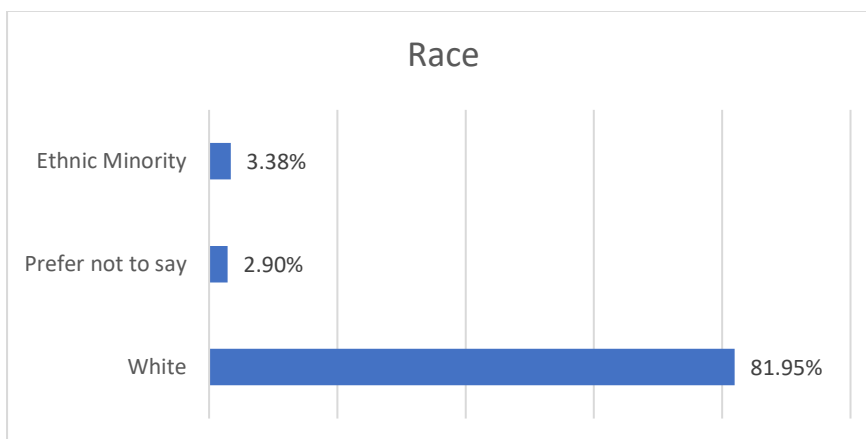
Colleagues can easily update information about disabilities and SQA works with its occupational health provider to ensure risk assessments and/or reasonable adjustments are considered and where necessary put in place for any colleague at any point during their employment.

Marital and civil partnership



87.74% of colleagues have provided marital status information. 42.28% of colleagues are married or in a civil partnership and 37.36% are single. The last marital status population estimates for Scotland have not been updated by National Records of Scotland since 2009, so we have chosen not to make any comparison for this protected characteristic.

Race



According to the Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019 (Last updated: January 2021), 5% of the adult population in Scotland were minority ethnicity¹.

The majority of SQA colleagues (88.22%) have provided data regarding their ethnicity.

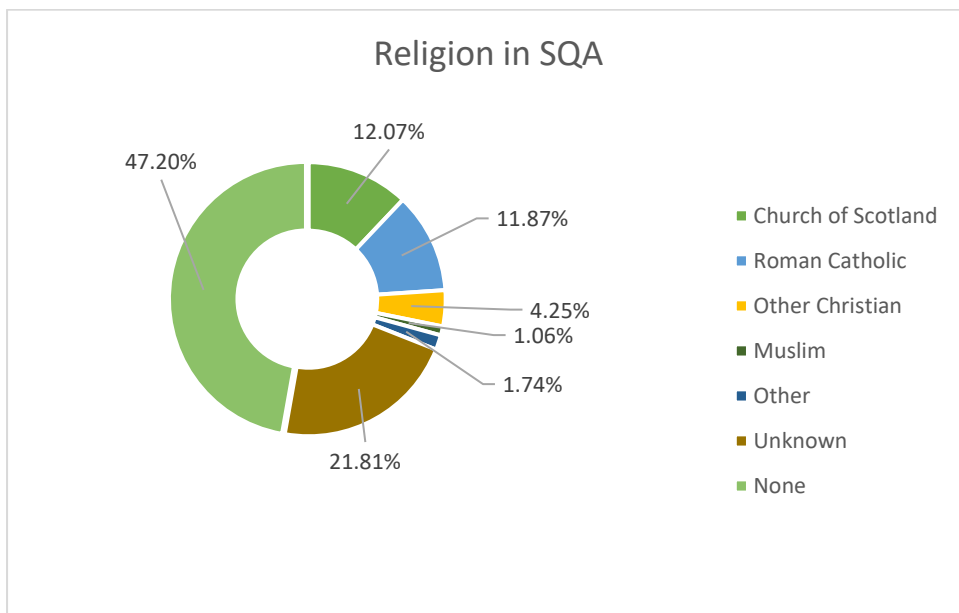
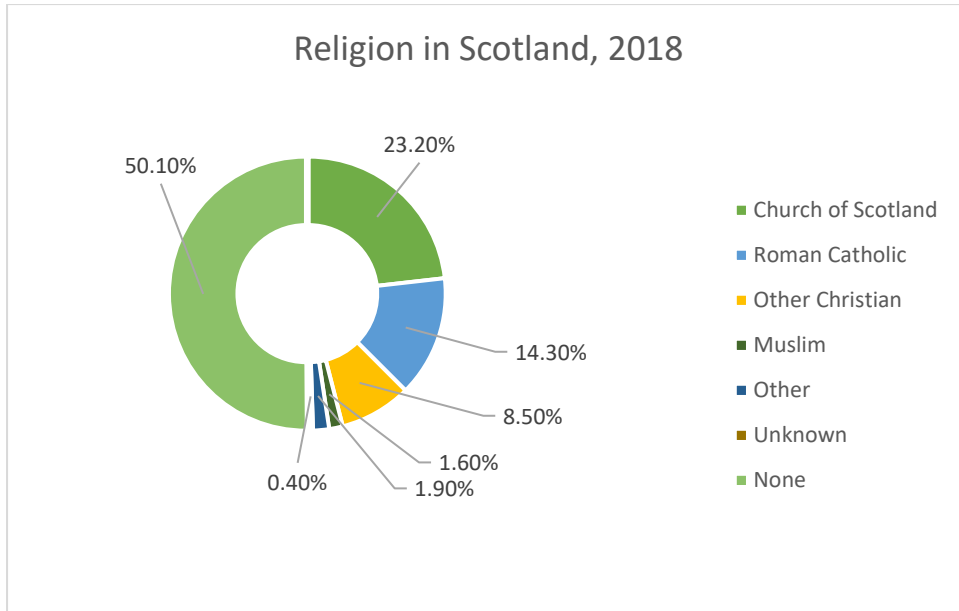
Colleague data shows that SQA has a slightly lower level of diversity across its workforce when compared to the Scottish population more generally.

There has been a 0.22 % increase in the number of ethnic minority colleagues from 3.16% in 2020 to 3.38% in 2022. This slight increase is due to recruitment of ethnic minority staff. The largest Ethnic Minority group at SQA is Asian, Scottish Asian, or British Asian.

We are a signatory of Business in the Community's (BITC) Race at Work Charter and are working to meet the commitments laid out within the charter. In 2022, we partnered with VERCIDA.com, experts in diversity and inclusion to advertise vacancies to a wider network

of people. Early this year we began a review of our recruitment proposition which will review the end-to-end recruitment process and look at ways to make the organisation more attractive to people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

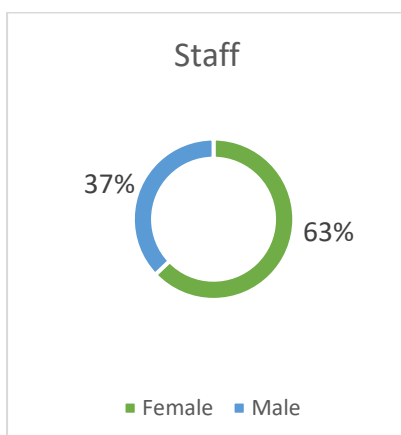
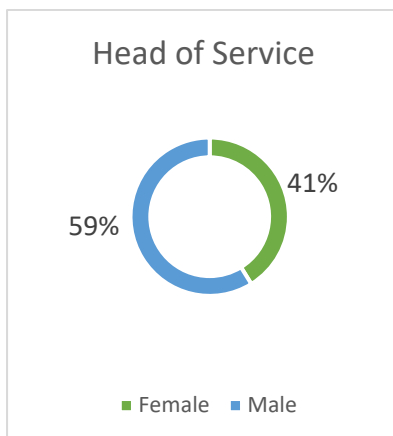
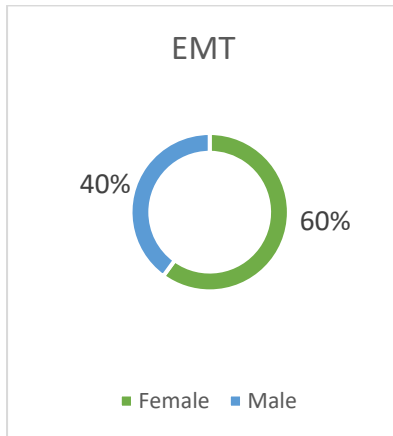
Religion or belief



The majority of colleagues (88.13%) have provided data regarding their religion or belief. The diversity of religion and belief broadly mirrors that of the population of Scotland. However, we have a higher unknown rate due to 9.94% of colleagues who have declared they would prefer not to share their religion or belief and 11.87% of colleagues who have not provided information on their religion or belief. We will continue to encourage employees to disclose information about their religion or belief through future equality data awareness and collection campaigns.

We encourage managers to be flexible in the approval of annual leave requests to support colleagues to observe key dates in their religious calendar and engage in such events and occasions. We have also made allowances for colleagues to use rooms for praying during working days in our offices.

Sex



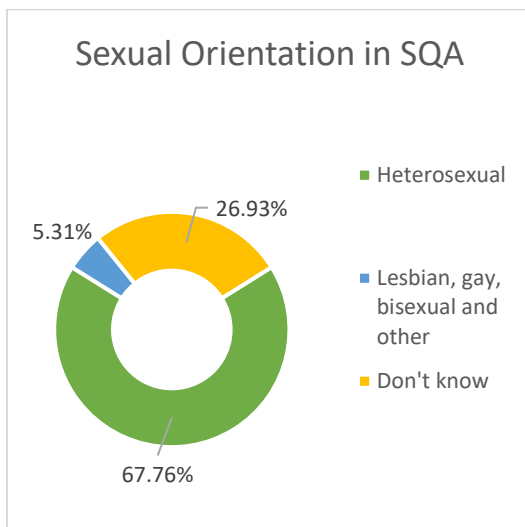
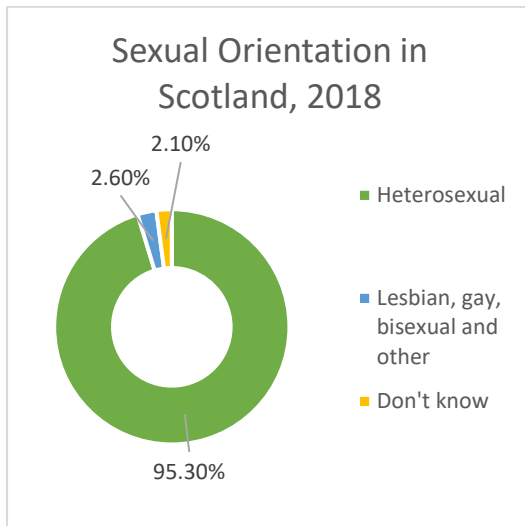
51% of Scotland's population are female and 49% male.²

² Scottish population figures on all protected characteristics are from Scottish Government Equality data: <http://www.equalityevidence.scot/> (Last updated: April 2020, NRS).

In SQA:

- ◆ 63% of colleagues are women and 37% are men.
- ◆ The Head of Service group has 14 women (41%) and 20 men (59%).
- ◆ The Executive Management Team (EMT) has 6 females (60%) and 4 men (40%).

Sexual orientation



81.76% of colleagues at SQA have chosen to disclose their sexual orientation.

Our workforce has double the representation of the overall Scottish population self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual or in another way. The proportion of colleagues identifying as heterosexual is below national indicators, and the proportion of our workforce whose sexual orientation is unknown is just over ten times the national indicator. This is due to 8.49% of colleagues declaring they would prefer not to share their sexual orientation, 0.19% of colleagues who are unsure of their sexual orientation, and 18.24% of colleagues who have not provided sexual orientation information. We will continue to encourage employees to disclose information about their sexual orientation through future equality data awareness and collection campaigns.

Conclusion

We continue to have a high level of engagement from colleagues with over 80.00% providing their equality monitoring data. This has helped us to carry out more meaningful and accurate analysis to help identify areas of under-representation and develop action plans to address them. In addition, we were able to use colleague equality monitoring data to inform the completion of Equality Impact Assessments and associated action plans related to HR and People Reward & Equality policies in Autumn 2022.

Colleague equality monitoring data is vital to the organisation and informs which equality initiatives we should implement as well as where improvements may be made. We will continue to communicate its importance to our colleagues.

Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018

The intention of the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 is to help address the historic and persistent under-representation of women in public life. SQA is required to publish details of

- a) the gender composition of its board and
- b) how the information has been and will be used to facilitate succession planning to increase the board's diversity.

SQA's Board of Management gender representation is reported as part of our workforce equality monitoring report. SQA has worked proactively with Scottish Government for a number of years to ensure diversity and gender balance of the SQA Board.

Appendix 2: Links to other information

There is more information on our [Equality outcomes, reports and policies web page](#). Here, you will find:

- ◆ Our 2023 Equal Pay Audit Summary, which gives information about pay gaps, and a breakdown of average salaries as at 31 January 2023
- ◆ Our Workforce Equality Monitoring Report, which also explores occupational segregation
- ◆ Equal Pay Statement
- ◆ Commitment to race equality in employment