

Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment: 2027 National Qualifications Exam Timetable Production

Section 1: Background and context

Approach to impact assessment

This document summarises the evidence that Qualifications Scotland considered when finalising the 2027 exam timetable for National Courses. We support lifelong learning, and award qualifications to learners of all ages, but many learners taking our graded National Courses are aged between 15 and 18, and would be defined as a 'child' under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

We have reviewed the range of available evidence to inform our decisions in the context of our duties as the statutory national awarding body in Scotland for qualifications other than degrees. These duties are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 2025.

Section 4 sets out the assessment of the impact of our 2027 National Qualifications (NQ) timetable in relation to children and young people's rights and wellbeing.

More information with an equality focus is available in our accompanying equality impact assessment for the 2027 NQ timetable.

Section 2: CRWIA Stage 1 – Screening key questions

1 Name the policy and describe its overall aims

We develop and set the timetable for all NQ exams each year. This process allows a clear and consistent approach to its publication.

The NQ framework is Scotland's national system of qualifications for learners in secondary schools and colleges. It includes National Courses (National 1 to National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher qualifications), Scottish Baccalaureates and Skills for Work qualifications. These qualifications are taken mainly by children and young people during the senior phase of secondary education, from S4 to S6, as well as by college students, adult learners and learners with training providers.

NQ exams are the external assessment element of National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses. They form part of a nationally standardised assessment and certification system. Learners are assessed against defined course requirements and national standards, with marking and grading processes designed to produce fair and consistent results across Scotland. The exams allow learners to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills. These nationally recognised qualifications can be used for progression to further or higher education, training and employment.

As the national awarding and accreditation body, we organise and award the NQ exams. Under the Education (Scotland) Act 2025, our statutory functions include developing, validating, quality assuring and awarding a national framework of qualifications. We manage the annual exam diet, maintain assessment standards, oversee marking and grading, and issue results and qualification certificates.

When scheduling the exam timetable each year, we consider the following:

- Number of entries — we ensure exams with a high number of entries (such as English and Mathematics) are not scheduled on the same day.
- Coincident exams — learners scheduled to sit more than one exam at the same time and date.
- Exam workload — the number of learners scheduled to sit exams five out of six days.
- The number of learners scheduled to sit more than one exam in one day.
- Public holidays, including dates of each local authority returning from Easter break.
- Significant religious or holy festivals or events that coincide with exam days.
- Scheduling to minimise exceeding our six-hour exam time guideline, particularly for disabled learners and those with additional support needs who need extra time to complete their exams.

- All marking and awarding procedures must be complete by beginning of July to allow Operations colleagues to finalise the processing of learner results by the third week of July. This ensures certificates are produced in time to be sent to learners on Results Day in August.

3 What aspects of the service will affect children and young people up to the age of 18?

We support lifelong learning and equality of access to our qualifications and assessments, including exams for National Courses. As Scotland's national awarding body, we award and certify qualifications for learners of all ages, but many learners sitting exams for National Courses are aged between 15 and 18 and would identify as children as defined by the UNCRC.

4 What likely impact — direct or indirect — will the service have on children and young people?

As over 99% of learners entered for our National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher are between the ages of 15 and 18, they will be directly impacted by any decisions taken with the scheduling of the 2027 exam timetable.

5 Which groups of children and young people will be affected?

We understand that 'child' means every human being below the age of 18, unless majority is attained earlier under the law applicable to the child. Our corporate parenting responsibilities under the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 not only apply to children who are looked after by local authorities, but also to young people up to the age of 26 who were looked after at age 16 or later.

Our 2027 exam timetable will apply equally to all young people, but we recognise that decisions we take may have specific impacts on learners on the basis of their disability or additional support need and religion or belief. Further details on this are available in section 4 below.

6 Will this require a CRWIA?

Yes. We recognise that the 2027 exam timetable will directly impact all children sitting our National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams. We have completed a full CRWIA to evidence our considerations.

Section 3: The CRWIA – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

We consider that the following articles are particularly relevant to our Equality of Access to Qualifications policy:

- Article 2: non-discrimination
- Article 3: best interests of the child
- Article 12: respect for the views of the child
- Article 13: freedom of expression
- Article 14: freedom of thought, belief and religion
- Article 17: access to information from the media
- Article 23: children with a disability
- Article 28: right to education
- Article 29: goals of education
- Article 30: children from minority or indigenous groups

Article 2: non-discrimination

Children should not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of their rights. No child should be discriminated against because of the situation or status of their parent/carer(s).

Article 2 also deals with discrimination based on most of the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act 2010, but it is not identical. For example, it deals with discrimination based on the characteristics and political opinions of a child's parents and guardians and on 'activities' and 'property'.

Article 3: best interests of the child

Every decision and action taken relating to a child must be in their best interests. Governments must take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures to ensure that children have the protection and care necessary for their wellbeing — and that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for their care and protection conform to established standards.

Article 12: respect for the views of the child

Children have the right to give their opinions freely on issues that affect them. Adults should listen and take children seriously.

Article 13: freedom of expression

Every child has the right to be free to express their thoughts and opinions and to access information that support their understanding of matters that affect them, as long as it is within the law.

Article 14: freedom of thought, belief and religion

Every child has the right to think and believe what they choose, and to practise their religion, as long as they are not stopping other people from enjoying their rights. This article applies directly to governments and public authorities who must respect the rights and responsibilities of parents to guide their child as they grow up.

Article 17: access to information from the media

Every child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral wellbeing and physical and mental health. The article is principally about the mass media but we recognise that the information we produce contributes to the fulfilment of Article 17.

Article 23: children with a disability

Every child with a disability should enjoy the best possible life in society. Governments should remove all obstacles for children with disabilities to become independent and to participate actively in the community.

Article 28: right to education

Every child has the right to education no matter who they are: regardless of race, gender, or disability; if they are in detention; or if they are a refugee. While we do not determine the right to education in Scotland, we do have a responsibility to provide assessment and certification of our qualifications for learners.

Article 29: goals of education

Children's education should help them fully develop their personalities, talents and abilities. It should teach them to understand their own rights, and to respect other people's rights, cultures and differences. It should help them to live peacefully and protect the environment.

Article 30: children from minority or indigenous groups

Every child has the right to learn and use the language, customs and religion of their family, whether or not these are shared by the majority of the people in the country where they live.

Section 4: Assessment of impact and mitigations

Key elements

This part of the impact assessment further examines the key elements of the decisions we took when producing the 2027 NQ exam timetable in line with the relevant UNCRC Articles as outlined in section 3 and considers:

- whether the 2027 exam timetable may have different impacts on different groups of young people
- what mitigating actions we might adopt if a potential negative impact was identified for any area of rights or any group of young people
- where aspects of the decisions can contribute to the rights of children in Scotland

Potential impacts on children and young people

We held a public consultation to gather the views and feedback on the provisional 2027 NQ exam timetable from children and young people, parents, carers and educators. This feedback was used alongside feedback from our Timetable Advisory Group, who provides advice and challenge on the development of the exam timetable, to inform any changes before we finalise and publish the timetable. A total of 390 individuals responded to this consultation, with 164 learners participating (Articles 12 and 13). As we didn't collect equality data of participants, it is not possible to identify how many of the 164 learners who participated in the consultation were children.

The provisional 2027 exam timetable was generally seen as a positive basis for further refinement. Respondents welcomed the consultation process and the additional teaching time after Easter. Some described the timetable as improved compared with previous years. At the same time, the feedback identified several areas where the timetable could be strengthened to support learner wellbeing, fairness and operational delivery.

Concentration of common subject combinations

The strongest cross-cutting theme was the clustering of subjects commonly taken together. Respondents highlighted pressure around English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Modern Studies, Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS), Geography, History, Politics and Psychology. The main concern was that learners may face several demanding, content-heavy or literacy-heavy exams within a short period. This was linked to reduced revision time, limited recovery time, stress and potential impact on attainment.

Mathematics and Applications of Mathematics

Mathematics and Applications of Mathematics generated the highest volume of repeated subject-specific feedback. Many respondents felt these subjects were too late in the diet and should be closer to the start, or at least closer together. Feedback linked late placement to reduced learner momentum, loss of classroom contact, potential inequality for learners without private tuition, and marker recruitment or marking timeline pressures.

Late finishes and transport impacts

Late afternoon exam finishes were a major operational and equity concern. Respondents highlighted issues for rural and island learners, those relying on school transport, learners with extra time, and schools that finish early on Fridays. There was repeated feedback that exams should finish within the normal school day where possible, with many respondents suggesting no later than around 15:30 to 15:45.

Assessment arrangements and centre delivery

Centres highlighted growing operational pressure from assessment arrangements, particularly where learners require extra time, access to ICT, scribes, separate accommodation or adjusted start times (Article 23). Subjects referenced most often included Administration & IT, Applications of Mathematics, Business Management, RMPS and ESOL. Thirty-minute gaps between papers were also raised as a concern for being too short, particularly where extra time reduces the effective break available to learners between exams or papers.

Balance across the six-week diet

A recurring structural point was that weeks one to four appear to carry most of the high-entry subjects, while weeks five and six appear lighter. Some respondents suggested using the later weeks more effectively to reduce clustering earlier in the diet. There were also requests for greater year-on-year rotation so that subjects such as Art & Design, Computing Science, Psychology, Sociology and Accounting are not routinely placed late in the timetable.

Positive feedback

We also noted positive feedback from the consultation:

- Respondents welcomed the chance to comment before timetable publication.
- The later start after Easter has been welcomed, but will not always remain the case in future years.

- Improved spacing for some individual subject combinations; however, the balance can create pressure for learners in other areas.

Several responses described the draft as better than recent timetables and a reasonable basis for final refinement.

Religious observance of Pesach and Eid-al-Adha

We received feedback from the Jewish Council of Scotland and Scottish Jewish Educators Association as part of the 2027 provisional exam timetable consultation. Both organisations raised concerns about the Graphic Communication, RMPS and Physics exams at all levels. These were provisionally scheduled on 28 and 29 April 2027, which coincided with the last two days of Pesach (or Passover) and would impact observant Jewish learners (Articles 14 and 30). The last two days of Pesach are days of rest which means that observant Jewish people avoid working, including studying or sitting exams, on these days.

In addition to this a centre also approached us to advise that a large number of their Muslim learners will be observing Eid-al-Adha, which starts from sundown of 16 May and ends at sundown on 17 May 2027. The centre was concerned that the scheduling of four high-uptake exams (History, Design and Manufacture, English for Speakers of Other Languages and Chemistry) in the provisional timetable would have an impact on observant learners.

Feedback also suggests that learners may be uncomfortable with disclosing their religion or belief to their school and that we should consider reviewing our Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) process and allow learners the option of accessing the service directly. We are aware that the current political discourse has resulted in heightened media attention particularly for people who visibly belong to a religious or belief group.

There has also been an increasing volume in hate crime. For example, learners may face discrimination, bullying or harassment for wearing any religious garments such as a kippah, turban, hijab, abaya or burka. According to the [Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service](#), 537 charges of religious aggravation were reported in 2025–26, 5.1% more than in 2024–25. The [Community Security Trust](#) recorded 1926 antisemitic incidents across the UK in the first half (between January and June) of 2026, a 21% increase compared to the first half of 2025. We also recognise that following a recent crime committed by a Sikh man, the Sikh community has experienced a surge in hate crime. As this is not recorded in a similar way to hate crime against Jews and Muslims, it has not been possible to obtain statistical information to understand the level of impact on the Sikh community.

Areas for further review

The feedback suggests we should consider the following areas before final publication:

- Mathematics and Applications of Mathematics should be moved earlier or positioned closer together.
- High-uptake subject combinations should be spaced more evenly across the full diet.
- Humanities and social subjects and essay-heavy subjects should be better spaced.
- Late afternoon finishes should be reduced, particularly for long exams and subjects with high volumes of assessment arrangement requests. There are 10 subject and levels where exams ran beyond 15:45 in the provisional timetable.
- Reduce the operational impact for centres of ICT heavy subjects through timing or sequencing changes.
- Weeks five and six should be used more effectively to ease pressure in weeks two to four.
- Recurring late-placement subjects should be rotated in future diets.

In addition to the feedback from the consultation, we are also conscious of the following impacts of our timetabling decision on learners:

- Learners may experience bullying or discrimination which may impact on their ability to sit exams.
- Disabled learners and those with additional support needs who need extra time as an assessment arrangement may be sitting exams for six hours or more (not including breaks) in one day.

Steps taken to mitigate impacts

In deciding which exams to be allocated on each day, we considered:

- the number of exams a learner sits in one day
- potential pressure from sitting a number of exams on five out of six days
- potential coincident exams
- the number of learners sitting multiple exams in one day with a total exam time of six hours or more

The following mitigations are available to learners where negative impacts could not be removed.

Religious observance of Pesach and Eid-al-Adha

Pesach

We have decided to move the Graphic Communication, RMPS and Physics exams at all levels to alternative dates within the exam period. Gàidhlig exams, which have significantly lower entries, have been moved to 28 and 29 April 2027 instead. In 2026, we had a total of almost 34,000 entries for Graphic Communication, RMPS and Physics at all levels. In comparison, we had 418 entries across National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher Gàidhlig exams.

Based on 371 learners between the ages of 15 and 19 specifying their religion as Jewish in [Scotland's Census 2022](#), we expect that this will equate to 0.25% of all 150,000 learners estimated to be entered for National Courses. Although we are unable to specify how many observant Jewish learners are entered for Gàidhlig exams at all levels, we anticipate that the number will be significantly lower than Graphic Communication, RMPS and Physics. If no observant Jewish learners are entered for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher Gàidhlig, this decision will have no negative impact on this group of learners. We recognise, however, that as we don't have any data on learners' religion or belief, nor the holy or religious festivals or dates they observe, it is still possible that observant Jewish learners may be entered for Gàidhlig, and will remain impacted (Articles 3, 14, 17, 28, 29 and 30).

Eid-al-Adha

Historically, we received enquiries about support for Muslim learners who were fasting for Ramadan and celebrating Eid-al-Adha during the exam period. We made alternative arrangements such as ensuring centres were aware that EECCS requests could be submitted on behalf of learners who were fasting and whose performance in an exam was impacted on the day, or if they were unable to attend the exam. Alternatively, during Eid-al-Adha, if a learner required time for prayers, they could work with their centres to find a quiet space for prayer and request a longer break between exams by submitting a change of timetable request if needed. We previously received a large number of enquiries around 2013–14 regarding support for Muslim learners, but due to retention periods, we no longer have access to the number of enquiries received at the time. However, as more centres have become aware of these arrangements which have been in place for over 10 years, the number of enquiries on this subject have decreased.

In 2026, we received feedback that the original date scheduled for Urdu would have an impact on all observant Muslim learners entered for this course, as it coincided with Eid-al-Adha which was on 26 to 29 May 2026. As a result, we scheduled Urdu for an alternative date with other exams scheduled on this day.

After receiving feedback from the provisional 2027 timetable consultation, we reviewed the scheduling of exams and made changes. As mentioned above, a centre has advised that a large number of their Muslim learners who will be observing Eid-al-Adha will be impacted by the scheduling of four high-uptake exams: History, Design and Manufacture, English for Speakers of Other Languages and Chemistry. Instead of four high-uptake exams scheduled over the period of Eid-al-Adha, only Mathematics exams at all levels have now been scheduled for 17 May 2027.

Based on desk-based research and speaking with the Muslim community, our understanding is that while observant Muslim learners may be attending morning prayers and the sermon, as well as participating in any community gatherings afterwards, they are not restricted from carrying out work, study or travel in the same way observant Jewish learners are during Pesach.

Mathematics has a high number of entries, which is likely to include a number of observant Muslim learners. We recognise that having an exam on the day of Eid-al-Adha can disrupt their day and the events involved (Article 14). Depending on the region, some mosques may have morning prayers scheduled at different times, with the earliest ones scheduled for 7 am, but regions with smaller Muslim communities may only have one prayer session scheduled. Some families will also fast the day before Eid-al-Adha, which could have an impact on learners' performance on the day of the exam.

While we recognise that Muslim learners and the community may view this as their needs not being met with the importance of celebrating Eid-al-Adha (Articles 2, 3 and 14), we cannot consider the timetabling of Mathematics exams in isolation.

Mathematics, with its high number of entries, is taken alongside a wide range of other subjects. Moving Mathematics exams at all levels would create new coincident exam combinations, increase subject clustering and reduce the spacing available between exams for many learners. It would also require several other scheduled exams to be moved, with each change creating further consequences. The current scheduling of the Mathematics exams supports the overall balance of the diet, and any significant movement would disrupt the carefully managed equilibrium across the timetable.

Observant Jewish and Muslim learners and EECCS

For Jewish learners observing Pesach who are impacted in Gàidhlig exams scheduled on 28 and 29 April 2027, and Muslim learners observing Eid-al-Adha who are impacted in Mathematics exams on 17 May 2027, centres can submit EECCS requests on their behalf. Learners' grades for affected exams will be based on completed coursework components and any alternative academic learner evidence submitted by the centre (Articles 28 and 29).

Considering direct access to EECCS for religious observance reasons

We have considered whether it is feasible to change our existing policy and introduce learner-direct access to EECCS for religious observance reasons. However having considered all of the relevant factors, we have determined that it is not possible. The conditions that must be fulfilled for a learner's exam to be eligible for EECCS includes, but is not limited to, confirmation that an estimate had been submitted, all required course components have been completed, and that alternative academic evidence is available. Even if we offered learner-direct access, only the centre can verify the required information to ensure eligibility. In this instance, the centre would also be notified of an EECCS being submitted by the learner.

The centre is also best placed to advise the learner, based on the alternative academic evidence they hold, whether an EECCS request may be successful. In addition to this we do not request details to support the nature of an EECCS request and we rely on a head of centre to establish that the learner has experienced a valid exam exceptional circumstance.

While we understand and recognise learners' discomfort with sharing their religious denomination or belief, only allowing learners to directly access EECCS on the basis of their religion or belief could potentially discriminate learners from other equality groups who also experience hate crime, bias and discrimination. Centres have also fed back to us previously that they would not be in a position to resource a learner-direct access to EECCS, as the current process of collating all relevant information for the service is time consuming and resource intensive. This is another reason why we are unable to offer direct learner access.

Logistical considerations of allowing learners to sit exams on an alternative date

We understand that learners should be given the best possible chance of demonstrating the knowledge, skills and understanding that they have gained throughout the academic year in exams. We had considered whether, for example, observant Jewish and Muslim learners might be allowed to sit the Gàidhlig and Mathematics exams respectively on an alternative date. However, this option creates logistical issues not just for us but also for presenting centres:

- The same supervision requirements that apply to change of timetable requests will apply. If a learner requests to sit an exam on another date, the centre is responsible for ensuring the learner has not had contact with anyone else. This includes ensuring they have not been able to access their phone or the Internet from the scheduled start time of the exam until the alternative date. Centres have previously advised that this is a child welfare risk and that they were unable to sustain this arrangement, and it also creates reputational risk for Qualifications Scotland.

- Due to the significant amount of time and resourcing required to produce a question paper for each exam, which involves 18 months of preparation, production and quality assurance, it is not possible for us to resource and produce alternative exam papers for learners to sit exams on alternative dates.
- The same constraints with scheduling the 2027 timetable mentioned above applies with finding suitable alternative dates for exams. It is not possible to ensure that alternative dates would be suitable for learners observing religious festivals or events.
- Centres have a specified number of teaching days each year and factor in time to accommodate the number of learners sitting exams, the number of rooms needed and release of staff for marking procedures before the summer holidays. Centres may not be able to resource the delivery of exams on additional alternative days.

Existing processes to support learners sitting exams

Centres can request existing services on behalf of learners, such as the change of timetable process to change the start time to an exam due to a learner's disability or additional support need (Articles 3 and 23), or if a learner is observing a religious or holy festival or event (Articles 14 and 30). Centres can advance or delay the start time of an exam by up to 30 minutes without informing us. If needed, a change of timetable request can be submitted to change the start time by more than 30 minutes, provided this request is accompanied by full details of supervision requirements. This allows centres to extend the duration of any breaks between exams or change the start time to accommodate individual disabled learners' needs.

Advanced publication of the timetable can be beneficial in providing disabled learners, particularly neurodivergent learners, with information that allows them to organise and plan for upcoming exams (Article 23). This can include, for example, allowing them to prepare and structure their time for study and revision in advance. In addition, any learners who need to attend medical appointments can plan these accordingly.

Temporary disability arrangements could be requested to allow the learner to complete their exams in separate or small group accommodation, for example, take breaks if needed to alleviate any anxiety, take food, drink or medication. If a learner's exam performance has been impacted, or if they have not been able to sit the exam because of bullying, centres can also request EECSS on their behalf (Articles 2 and 3).

Access to EECSS

In 2026, we changed our EECSS policy to extend the service to disabled learners who may be sitting exams with a total duration of six hours or more (not including scheduled breaks) in one day (Articles 2, 3, 23, 28 and 29). This also applies if, due to exceptional

circumstances, they were unable to sit one or more of the exams. We expect that this change would have a positive impact for disabled learners and those with additional support needs who have extra time as an assessment arrangement, resulting in a significantly increased total exam duration.

As Scotland's awarding body, we have a duty to ensure that all awards issued to learners are fair and equitable. This means that we must base all results on evidence of a learner's demonstrated attainment. The only way we can do this in the EECCS is by centres submitting alternative academic evidence which a learner has completed throughout the academic year. We do not specify what types of evidence should be submitted — this can include prelims or mock exams, end of topic assessments, performance recordings (for practical courses) or classwork. A senior examiner considers all alternative evidence along with any completed externally assessed components (such as coursework and any attempted part of an exam) to reach a holistic decision about the grade to be awarded.

We understand that there may be extenuating circumstances which could impact on a learner's ability to complete internal assessments, and that there may be instances where they may feel that it doesn't accurately reflect what they know and can do. However, we must base all awards on available evidence provided to us. This eliminates any potential bias in the marking process and maintains confidence users (such as learners, higher and further education institutions, employers and training providers) have in our awarding process and awarded qualifications.

Communication with children and young people and monitoring feedback

We will continue to review the feedback we receive and maintain ongoing dialogue with groups representing the interests of children and young people to explain our decisions. We will also continue to review the information we make available to ensure we provide the diverse community of children and young people with the right level of detail and understanding about our timetabling decisions (Articles 13, 17, 23, 28, 29 and 30).

Before publishing the exam timetable each year, we will continue to consult with children and young people to respect and listen to their views (Article 12). We will also ensure that we ask for equality data to allow us to better understand if learners from marginalised groups have different experiences with the exam timetable because of a protected characteristic (Articles 2, 3, 14, 23 and 30).

We hope that externally publishing this impact assessment alongside the 2027 exam timetable provides further transparency about our decision making process and demonstrates our commitment to ensuring all learners have an equal opportunity to sit their exams as much as possible (Article 2, 3, 14, 17, 23, 28, 29 and 30).