

Equality Impact Assessment (supporting guidance available)

Summary

Name of Policy or practice	National Qualifications (NQ) exam timetable production		
New Policy or Revision	New EQIA		
Policy Owner (role)	Qualifications Development/Operations		
Date Policy Owner Confirmed Completion			
Agreed Schedule Review Date	As and when required	Additional review date (Action review date)	

Action plan

This section is completed at the end of the equality impact assessment. Due to the importance of embedding equality in Qualifications Scotland through our actions, the action plan will be the focus and record of ongoing actions.

Explain how you will monitor and record the actual impact on equality groups, including how the evidence can be revisited to measure the actual impact.

Required actions	Owner	Date	Comment and review
Analysis of number, type, trends or patterns of coincident exams, assessment arrangement requests or other themes emerging from the operation of the NQ exam timetable	Organisation — QD/Ops/PAS	Ongoing	
Review of information on religious observances for all religious groups	Organisation — Ops/EDI colleagues	Ongoing	

Identified actions	General equality duty	Owner	Date	Comment and review
Continue to monitor requests and feedback from internal and external stakeholders	I	Organisation — QD/Ops/PAS	Ongoing	Qualifications Scotland staff will continue to monitor feedback and requests for change from internal and external stakeholders to identify potential areas for improvement to how we arrange our NQ exam timetable.
Introduce provisional publication of the annual NQ exam timetable	I, II and III	Organisation — Ops	Ongoing	Qualifications Scotland staff will continue to gather feedback from internal and external stakeholders to identify potential areas for improvement to how we arrange our NQ exam timetable.
Conduct training on religious observances for all Qualifications Scotland staff involved in producing the timetable	I, II and III	Organisation — Ops	Ongoing	Work with interfaith groups to conduct training for all staff involved in producing the timetable, giving an understanding on the impact of any religious observances during the timetable period.

Executive summary

Our ongoing, annual process to develop and set the NQ exam timetable allows a clear and consistent approach to its publication. Its aim is to:

- produce a single NQ exam timetable that is consistent across centres,
- give learners clear information about their exam schedule, and
- support fair and equitable access to assessments for all learners, including those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

We must set the annual NQ exam timetable within a narrow window, normally from late April to early June. The precise start and end dates change each year because several fixed and variable constraints must be balanced. The exam timetable planning process starts with agreed planning principles, operational requirements, and lessons from previous diets. We then develop a draft timetable using available evidence.

You said

We gathered feedback from learners, parents, carers, organisations representing learners from equality groups and educators from the wider education system through the publication of a provisional timetable. This allowed early review before finalising the timetable. Responses covered learner experience, centre delivery, marking considerations, subject placement and perceived fairness. Feedback was wide-ranging, but several consistent themes appeared across the weekly and general comments.

We heard

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.

There was also concern that the Graphic Communication, Physics and Religious, Moral and Philosophical Studies (RMPS) exams provisionally scheduled on 28 and 29 April 2027 would coincide with the last two days of Pesach, which would have a significant impact on observant Jewish learners.

After the provisional timetable consultation concluded, a centre 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 concern was that the scheduling of four high-uptake exams (History, Design and Manufacture, ESOL and Chemistry) in the provisional timetable would have an impact on observant learners.

We did

We have considered as much feedback as possible and made several adjustments, some of which are listed below:

- Brought forward Applications of Mathematics
- Improved spacing of high uptake subject combinations, taking in to account the operational deliverability, on a case-by-case basis
- Removed Modern Languages from day one
- Moved Drama away from English
- Spaced Health and Food Technology, Practical Cookery and Fashion and Textile Technology exams over a two-week period
- Increased spacing between Modern Studies and RMPS
- Moved Graphic Communication, Physics and RMPS exams to alternative dates; replaced them with lower uptake Gàidhlig exams at all levels
- Moved four high-uptake exams provisionally scheduled over the period of Eid-al-Adha and only schedule Mathematics exams at all levels for 17 May 2027

We considered

We understand that the decision to schedule Gàidhlig and Mathematics exams on days that coincide with key dates for Pesach and Eid-al-Adha will have a negative impact on observant Jewish and Muslim learners respectively. If an observant learner's exam coincides with events associated with Eid-al-Adha, they can speak with their centre to discuss requesting a change of timetable. If a learner was unable to sit an exam due to observance of religious of holy days or events, centres can submit EECCS requests on their behalf.

Feedback also suggests that learners may be uncomfortable with disclosing their religion or belief to their school and that we should consider reviewing our EECCS process and allow learners the option of accessing the service directly. 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.

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.

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.

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. 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 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.

We will

We anticipate that having a set of documented NQ Exam Timetable Planning Principles will clearly define how our colleagues create exam timetables. Along with additional supporting documentation to ensure we have considered all potential impacts on learners from equality groups, this will enable colleagues to continue to build on existing procedures, and improve inclusive decision making with provisional exam timetables. We will continue to monitor the process through feedback from provisional exam timetable consultation activity, as well as our standard channels for enquiries and complaints.

We will continue to liaise with organisations that represent people from different equality groups to understand and consider any disproportionate impact of the timetabling process on learners from all equality groups. We will also invite them to contribute towards future provisional exams timetable consultations for inclusive feedback.

1. Policy aims

1.1. What is the rationale for this policy or practice?

The relevant practice is our ongoing, annual process to develop and set the exam timetable for all NQ exams. 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, 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 awards 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.

We must set the annual NQ exam timetable within a narrow window, normally from late April (week 17 of the year) to early June (week 23 of the year). The precise start and end dates change each year because several fixed and variable constraints must be balanced.

Key scheduling constraints include:

- Easter and school holidays. The exam timetable normally begins after most schools return from the Easter break. Scottish local authorities set their own term dates, so there is no single national return date. The timing of Easter also changes each year. Starting too early would leave some learners with less teaching or revision time than others.
- The end of the school year. Most Scottish schools close for summer in late June. Exams must finish early enough for centres to complete associated administration while staff and learners remain available.
- Bank holidays. The timetable must accommodate early May and Spring bank holidays, which reduce the number of available exam days. Their position changes within the exam period from year to year.
- Religious observance. We must consider major religious festivals and periods of observance to reduce avoidable disadvantage. Some religious or holy days follow lunar or lunisolar calendars rather than the Gregorian calendar. This requires consideration of the dates religious or holy events fall on for any given year which can differ between exam diets.

- Marking and quality-assurance deadlines. Once an exam takes place, scripts must be processed, marked and quality assured. Grade boundaries must then be agreed and results checked before certification. Later exams leave less time for these activities, resulting in increased delivery risk and knock on effects of learners receiving their certificates as noted below. This process takes around 15 weeks from the start of the exam timetable.
- Results Day and admissions into further and higher education institutions. The whole process must work back from the fixed Scottish Results Day in early August (week 32 of the year). Results must be processed and supplied securely to UCAS before learners receive their certificates and centres (schools, colleges and training providers) receive a report of all learners' attainment. Employers and training providers who have issued learners with a conditional offer of employment or training placements also rely on the publication of results on this specific date. Further and higher education institutions, such as universities and colleges, as well as employers and training providers, are then able to confirm whether learners have been successful in securing conditional offers and support clearing.
- The number of exams. We must schedule National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher exams while limiting coincident exams and avoiding excessive clustering for learners taking common subject combinations.
- Operational capacity. The timetable must account for the availability of centres, invigilators, secure distribution arrangements, digital and IT facilities, markers and other specialist resources.
- Contingency arrangements. We must retain sufficient space within the diet and the wider certification timetable to respond to disruption without placing Results Day at risk.

For example, the 2026 diet ran from Wednesday 22 April to Tuesday 2 June, followed by Results Day on Tuesday 4 August.

Exam-setting and timetable-development process

The exam-setting and timetable-development process is the structured decision-making process used by Qualifications Scotland to plan the annual NQ exam diet.

The process includes reviewing feedback on a provisional timetable, balancing competing requirements and documenting the reasons for the decisions made. Timetabling impacts arise from how the process is designed and carried out, including whether relevant groups are identified, consulted and given a fair opportunity to influence the outcome. It also includes:

- decisions made in line with the 'NQ Exam Planning Principles'
- analysis of candidate-entry data,
- consideration of subject combinations and coincident exams,
- consultation with our Timetable Advisory Group (TAG), schools, colleges and other stakeholders,
- assessment of operational constraints, and
- consideration of equality, children's rights and other relevant impacts.

Finalisation of the exam timetable

The finalisation of the exam timetable is the ultimate decision on the dates and times assigned to each NQ exam.

The final timetable is the formal output of the wider planning process. Once approved and published, it determines when learners sit each exam and when schools, colleges and Qualifications Scotland must deliver the exam diet.

Varied impacts on learners and staff within the education sector can arise from the specific placement of exams, including the spacing and clustering of subjects, the number of exams a learner may sit within a short period, and the timing of exams in relation to personal or operational circumstances.

The process and the final timetable are therefore intertwined but distinct. The process concerns how decisions are reached. The final timetable concerns the output and effect of the decision reached.

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

The exam timetable planning process starts with agreed planning principles, operational requirements, and lessons from previous diets. We then develop a draft timetable using evidence listed below, such as subject entries, candidate combinations, scheduling of modern languages exams (including English for Speakers of Other Languages) and religious observance considerations.

We review the initial draft internally and test it with relevant stakeholders through consultation with the TAG. We assess feedback, equality impacts, and delivery risks annually, and request legal advice if needed, before making any changes to the final published timetable. The timetable is then approved through the agreed governance process before publication and operational planning begins.

The evidence that supports the process of developing and implementing the exam timetable includes:

- Feedback from the TAG, Qualifications Scotland staff, learners, parents, and educators regarding previous timetables. Section 2.1 provides more information on the remit and the process of the TAG.
- Statistical data on learners' workload and coincident exams. Learner workload is an overall percentage of the number of learners with exams on five days over a six-day period, worked through by Data and Analytics colleagues. Coincident exams are reviewed by exam timetable planning colleagues using previous years' entry data, to assist with placement of exams.
- Impact of overlapping exam schedules, coincident exam statistics, workload statistics, that is found in feedback from the TAG or the provisional timetable consultation.
- Analysis of previously received concerns and feedback related to potential bias in timetabling.

1.3. What are the aims of this policy or practice?

The aim of the process is to:

- produce a single NQ exam timetable that is consistent across centres,
- give learners clear information about their exam schedule, and
- support fair and equitable access to assessments for all learners, including those with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

The timetable is designed to balance national subject entry patterns (which are the patterns of subjects selected by learners on an annual basis) with learner experience, while maintaining assessment standards and operational deliverability. Through our timetable production process, we consider and address learners' workload, mental health and wellbeing, and aim to support fair and equitable access to assessments.

The review of coincident exams is a core part of the process. It identifies where learners are scheduled to sit two or more exams at the same time and seeks to minimise these clashes through structured modelling, historical data analysis and stakeholder review. Where coincident exams are unavoidable, we follow a standard business process in which Coincident Exam Reports are generated twice a year (in January and March) and sent to the relevant impacted centres. These detail the learners impacted, and the affected coincident exams. Centres are required to review this information and to suggest any changes to the start time of the affected exams, as well as supervision requirements. In some instances, the centre will inform us that a learner has been withdrawn from one or more courses, and they may no longer be impacted.

The process also tests combinations of subjects with high national entry to reduce avoidable high pressure clustering.

We advise centres to consider the wellbeing of learners who may be overfatigued from having to sit exams for an extended period of time. A longstanding six-hour daily exam threshold is used as a suggested guideline to limit excessive assessment time in a single day. We changed our Exam Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service (EECCS) policy in 2025–26 to extend the service to learners sitting exams with a total duration of six hours or more (not including any breaks) in one day. With their consent and the head of centre's discretion, their centre can submit an EECCS request on their behalf if their exam performance has been impacted, or 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 them sitting exams for a significantly increased period of time. The aim is to reduce fatigue-related disadvantage, prevent disproportionate impact on disabled learners, those with additional support needs or health conditions, and protect equitable access to certification.

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

While the timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, we recognise that learners from all equality groups access our National Courses and sit our exams, and may access assessments differently. The purpose of completing an equality impact assessment is to demonstrate how we have considered potential impacts on learners from equality groups in our decisions relating to the 2027 exam timetable, to ensure that they have equitable access to assessment opportunities. We aim to schedule exams efficiently while maintaining fairness, accessibility, and compliance with legal and regulatory standards. This is further supported by the introduction of provisional exam timetable consultation and the creation of a set of NQ Exam Timetable Planning Principles to guide the process of creating exam timetables, which will allow us to build on existing procedures and improve inclusive decision making.

We will continue to monitor the process through feedback from provisional exam timetable consultation activity, as well as our standard channels for enquiries and complaints.

2. Evidence, consultation and engagement

2.1. What stakeholders are engaged/consulted with in the development of this policy or practice?

A. Qualifications Scotland — TAG

The TAG provides advice and challenge on the development of the NQ exam timetable. Its role is to support fair, workable, and learner focused scheduling. It supports the preparation and review of the exam timetable, which begins around 18 months before the exam diet. It considers the full timetable as it develops, from early design through to finalisation and publication.

The group includes representatives from practicing teachers (qualifications coordinators), depute and head teachers, from local authority and independent schools, colleges, trade unions, local authorities, parent agencies, invigilation staff and Qualifications Scotland staff. Membership reflects a balance of operational, professional, and learner representative perspectives.

Role and responsibilities

- The group reviews draft timetables at key stages.
- It identifies potential pressures for learners, centres, and staff.
- It advises on exam spacing, subject combinations, and cumulative assessment load.
- It highlights equality, accessibility, and additional support needs considerations.
- It tests proposals against operational feasibility and delivery risk.
- It provides structured feedback to inform revisions.

The group is advisory. Final decisions rest with Qualifications Scotland, taking account of the group's advice alongside operational, regulatory, and delivery requirements.

The group meets at agreed points in the timetable-development cycle. Members provide evidence-based feedback informed by practice and data. All draft materials and discussions are treated as confidential until publication. This supports the delivery of a balanced, transparent, and credible exam timetable that reflects learner wellbeing, centre impact, and national delivery constraints.

Several advisory meetings were held where guidelines, principles and opinions were discussed, through workshop style meetings. This informed changes to drafts of the exam timetable and helped to develop the timetabling process.

B. Provisional exam timetable 2027

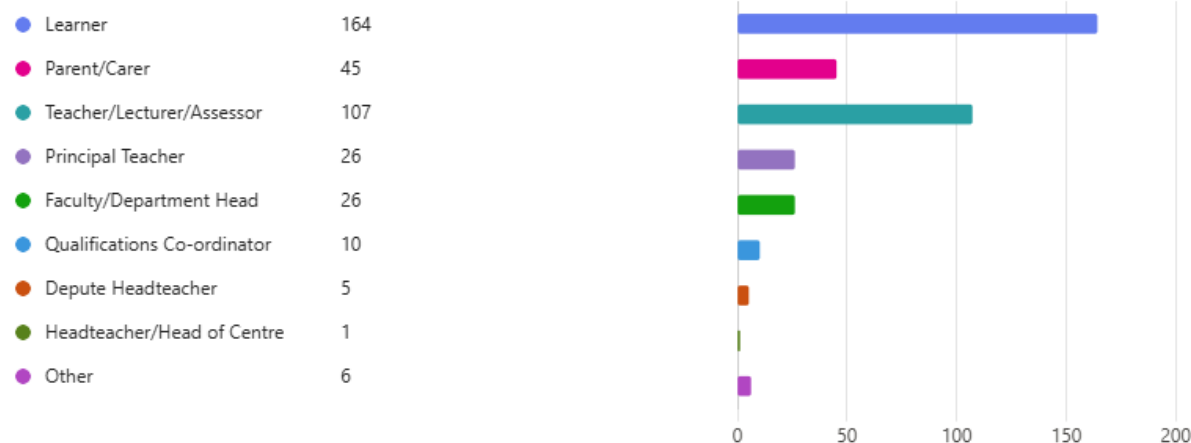
We gathered feedback from learners, parents, carers and educators from the wider education system through the publication of a provisional timetable.

We shared the provisional timetable for stakeholder feedback to support early review before finalising the timetable. The consultation invited comments on each week and general feedback on the overall timetable.

Responses covered learner experience, centre delivery, marking considerations, subject placement and perceived fairness. Feedback was wide-ranging, but several consistent themes appeared across the weekly and general comments. A summary of feedback is available on [our website](#).

Respondents totalled 390 and the representation is broken down in the graph below:

1. Representation / Role



This summary draws the themes of the feedback together for consideration and identifies the main areas where further review was required to inform the final timetable.

Overall position

The provisional 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. Subjects referenced most often included Administration & IT, Applications of Mathematics, Business Management, RMPS and English for Speakers of Other Languages (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:

- 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.

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/levels where exams run 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.
- Exams scheduled for 28 and 29 April 2027 conflict with last two days of Pesach (or Passover), during which observant Jewish learners are not allowed to work (including the sitting of exams).
- Exams scheduled on 17 May 2027 impact Muslim learners celebrating Eid-al-Adha.

Given the scale and complexity of the timetabling process, it would not be practicable to avoid all major religious festivals or observances. However, we recognise that we should apply a consistent equality-based approach when scheduling the exam timetable each year and consider the impact of scheduling decisions on learners from equality groups. This means identifying relevant dates, assessing the likely impact on learners, considering alternatives, weighing this against national timetable constraints, and recording the rationale for any decision and, where necessary, mitigations for unavoidable negative impacts.

We must apply a transparent and proportionate framework which considers the needs of learners and the impact of this on the scheduling of the exam timetable each year, to ensure we comply with our Public Sector Equality Duty.

Where practicable, we will avoid scheduling exams on the most significant religious observance days where, for example, work, study, sitting exams, travel or in-person attendance may be impacted. Where this is not practicable, we will document the rationale, including the operational constraints, the learner numbers affected, the alternatives considered, and any mitigation available.

2.2. What are the outcomes of these engagements/consultations?

We have considered as much feedback as possible and made several adjustments, some of which are listed below:

- Brought forward Applications of Mathematics
- Improved spacing of high-uptake subject combinations, taking in to account the operational deliverability, on a case-by-case basis
- Removed Modern Languages from day one
- Moved Drama away from English
- Spaced Health and Food Technology, Practical Cookery and Fashion and Textile Technology exams over a two-week period
- Increased spacing between Modern Studies and RMPS

2.3. What other evidence is gathered outwith stakeholder engagement/consultation, and how?

- **National statistics:** Educational data on learner demographics
- **Religious calendars:** Information on religious observances for all religious groups
- **Complaints and appeals:** Historical records to highlight recurring concerns
- Qualifications Scotland assessment arrangements data
- Qualifications Scotland Equalities Monitoring Report
- Impact of coincident exams on learner performance

2.4. What evidence relates specifically to protected characteristics?

Age	Our 2026 Equality Monitoring Report provides the following information in relation to the age of learners entered for National Courses at National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher levels: National 5 Below 15 — 0.2% Aged between 15 and 18 — 99.3% Over 18 — 0.5% Higher Below 15 — 0.0%
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	Aged between 15 and 18 — 99.3% Over 18 — 0.7% Advanced Higher Below 15 — 0.0% Aged between 15 and 18 — 99.7% Over 18 — 0.3% The majority of learners who are entered for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher 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). For this reason, we have also completed an associated Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment to reflect the impacts of the exam timetable process on the rights of children. Learners (including children and young people) along with teachers, lecturers and other stakeholders participated in the four-week public consultation on the provisional 2027 exam timetable in March 2026. Of the 390 survey responses received, 164 respondents were learners. Unfortunately, demographic data was not captured for the consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between learners from different age groups, but we will consider including this in future consultations.
Disability	Our 2026 Equality Monitoring Report provides the following information in relation to learners who, according to data from the Pupil Census, are ‘declared or assessed as disabled’: National 5 — 3.0% Higher — 2.7% Advanced Higher — 2.1% It is important to note however that these percentages only capture learner data from education authority schools. Published assessment arrangement data in 2026 shows that 129,700 assessment arrangement requests were submitted by centres for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher external assessments on behalf of 39,730 disabled learners or those with additional support needs. We recognise that not all learners who have a disability or additional support need will need assessment arrangements. This is the reason we take a needs-led approach to the provision of assessment arrangements. We also received some feedback as part of the consultation on the provisional 2027 timetable which will be discussed further below in the ‘Impacts and opportunities for action’ section.

Race	Our 2026 Equality Monitoring Report provides the following information in relation to learners' race: National 5 African/Black/Caribbean — 3.4% Asian – Chinese — 1.2% Asian – Indian — 1.5% Asian – Pakistani — 2.6% Asian – Other — 1.2% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups — 1.8% White (including Scottish and non-Scottish) — 84.8% All other categories — 1.6% Not disclosed/Not known — 1.8% Higher African/Black/Caribbean — 3.5% Asian – Chinese — 1.4% Asian – Indian — 1.8% Asian – Pakistani — 3.0% Asian – Other — 1.4% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups — 1.9% White (including Scottish and non-Scottish) — 83.9% All other categories — 1.5% Not disclosed/Not known — 1.5% Advanced Higher African/Black/Caribbean — 3.4% Asian – Chinese — 2.6% Asian – Indian — 2.7% Asian – Pakistani — 3.2% Asian – Other — 1.8% Mixed or multiple ethnic groups — 2.3% White (including Scottish and non-Scottish) — 81.0% All other categories — 1.7% Not disclosed/Not known — 1.3%
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	As noted above in relation to disability, these percentages only capture data for learners from education authority schools. While more than 80% of learners entered for National Courses at all levels are White, between 9.9% (National 5) and 13.7% (Advanced Higher) of all learners belong to Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic communities. This does not include those from mixed or multiple ethnic groups as we do not have any further information about which ethnic groups these learners belong to, but we recognise that this could contribute to a slightly higher percentage than reported. Demographic data was not captured for the provisional timetable consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between learners from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities compared to their White peers, but we will consider including this in future consultations.
Religion or belief	We do not hold or have access to data on learners' religion or belief. This information is also not available as part of Scottish Government's Pupil Census data. Although demographic data was not captured in the provisional timetable consultation, stakeholders did raise concerns about exams that were provisionally scheduled on 28 and 29 April 2027, which coincides with the last two days of Pesach (or Passover), and the impact of this on observant Jewish learners. After the consultation concluded, 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, ESOL and Chemistry) in the provisional timetable would have an impact on observant learners. Further detail on the consideration of this feedback is discussed below in the section 'Assessing Impacts and Opportunities for Action' for Religion or belief. As noted above, the majority of learners entered for National 5, Higher or Advanced Higher National Courses are between the ages of 15 and 18. According to Scotland's Census 2022, 371 people between the ages of 15 and 19 identified their religion as Jewish and 9,955 as Muslim. However, after discussions with the Jewish Council of Scotland and the Scottish Association of Jewish Educators, we established it is not possible to determine exactly how many Jewish learners will be impacted by the timetable. We have reviewed other religious dates that learners may observe during the exam period, but we haven't received any feedback in relation to conflict with other religious observances. However, we will continue to seek opportunities to capture or access this information to improve our process.
Sex	Our 2026 Equality Monitoring Report provides the following information in relation to learners' sex: National 5 Female — 49.3% Male — 50.7%

	Higher Female — 53.6% Male — 46.4% Advanced Higher Female — 57.1% Male — 42.9% The proportion of female learners entered for Higher and Advanced Higher courses is slightly higher compared to male learners. The scheduling of the timetable may have a differential impact on learners on the basis of their sex, for example learners who may be experiencing symptoms of Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) or symptoms linked with their menstrual cycle such as cramps or heavy bleeding. This is discussed in further detail in the section ‘Assessing Impacts and Opportunities for Action’ below. Demographic data was not captured for the provisional timetable consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between female and male learners, but we will consider including this in future consultations.
Sexual orientation	We do not hold or have access to data on learners’ sexual orientation. This information is also not available as part of Scottish Government’s Pupil Census data. According to the Office for National Statistics (ONS), an estimated 3.3% of the UK population aged 16 years and over identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) in 2022. For those aged 16 to 24 years, 9% or identified as LGB. No updated data beyond 2022 has yet been published. The scheduling of the timetable should not have a differential impact on learners on the basis of their sexual orientation. Demographic data was not captured for the provisional timetable consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between heterosexual and LGBTQIA+ learners, but we will consider including an optional question about respondents’ sexual orientation in future consultations.
Gender re-assignment (gender identity and transgender)	We do not hold or have access to data on learners’ gender identity or trans status. This information is also not available as part of Scottish Government’s Pupil Census data. According to Scotland's Census 2022, of those aged 16, 0.44% are trans or has a trans history. It is not possible to determine how many of these individuals are learners entered for our National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses who may be impacted by the scheduling of the timetable.

	The scheduling of the timetable should not have a differential impact on learners on the basis of their gender identity or trans status. Demographic data was not captured for the provisional timetable consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between learners according to their gender identity or trans status, but we will consider including an optional question about respondents' gender identity or trans status in future consultations.
Marriage / civil partnership	We do not hold any data on learners' marital or civil partnership status. Marital or civil partnership status, as a protected characteristic, is only relevant to employment-related policies and procedures. The scheduling of the timetable should not have any differential impact on the basis of learners' marital or civil partnership status.
Pregnancy / maternity	We do not request learner data regarding their pregnancy or maternity status, but we do hold information on the number of pregnant learners who may require temporary disability arrangements during the exams, those who have recently given birth or may have other support needs relating to their pregnancy or maternity status. Less than five learners required temporary disability arrangements as a result of their pregnancy or maternity in 2026. To protect their identities, we are not in a position to provide any further information. National Records of Scotland's report (published June 2026) shows that in the first quarter of 2026, the number of births was 2.6% lower than quarter 1 average of records from previous years. National Records of Scotland also noted: 'The live birth rate has generally been decreasing over time.' The scheduling of the timetable should not have a differential impact on learners on the basis of their pregnancy or maternity status.
Care experience (where relevant)	We have a corporate parenting commitment to ensure all of our processes consider the needs of care-experienced young people, by treating care experience as if it were a protected characteristic covered by the Equality Act 2010. According to the Scottish Government's Children's Social Work Statistics Scotland 2024 to 2025 report on 31 July 2025, 11,824 children in Scotland were looked after or on the Child Protection Register. The data also showed that there was a 5% increase in the number of children looked after at home compared to 2024, and that the most common placements away from home were kinship care (35%), foster care (28%) and residential accommodation (12%). However, according to Who Cares? Scotland, these statistics do not take into consideration circumstances such as informal kinship care. Moreover, some learners may have historic care experience even if they are not currently in care. No evidence of any potential barriers was identified as part of this review. While we are currently unable to report on the number of care-experienced learners taking our National Courses who may be impacted by timetabling decisions, we are exploring opportunities to access additional learner demographic data, including data on learners' looked after status. Demographic data was not captured for the provisional timetable consultation to allow us to analyse difference in feedback between care-experienced learners and their peers, but we will consider including this in future consultations.

Assessing Impacts and Opportunities for Action

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

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

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
Age	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of age. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or victimise learners or other individuals based on their age. We recognise that we have not been able to determine whether learners' feedback to the provisional timetable differed according to their age group.
	Going forward, we intend to include optional questions for all respondents to gather equality data and better monitor the needs of learners from different age groups.
	Advance equality of opportunity The TAG provided feedback that learners benefit from having structured timetables, including for exams. This supports learners of all ages by providing routine and predictability, and it also allows them to better plan and organise how they will prepare and study for upcoming exams they are entered for. The TAG also indicated that learners may find sitting multiple exams on the same day, or exams on consecutive days challenging. This can be particularly problematic for younger learners who are sitting exams in 2027 for the first time, which can exacerbate their feeling of exam anxiety and pressure. In addition, members also noted that mature learners may experience challenges with competing priorities or responsibilities, such as work commitments or making suitable care arrangements if they are a carer or have children of their own.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	While the feedback from the provisional timetable consultation did not allow us to determine whether learners' feedback differed according to age group, general concerns raised and suggestions given can be found in section 1. Anxiety and stress due to the unknown content of an exam and the pressure to perform well, especially for younger and returning learners, are known, unintended impacts of this summative assessment method. While it is not possible to remove these impacts, we publish the exam timetable as early as possible each year to inform learners of the exam dates as soon as possible after they have made their course choices. This not only allows them to plan their revision schedule and prepare for the upcoming exams, but it also allows them to plan family holidays and other events that they can look forward to once exams are complete. We are aware from previous years that families often like to know as early as possible when exams are being held to schedule such events. We also take every opportunity available to communicate exam-related information with learners, their parents and carers, and centres as early as possible. This includes informing learners about two exam timetable and learner apps we offer on our website: the MyExams app, which allows learners to create personal timetables, view their exam schedule, add notes and add their exams to other calendar apps; and the MyStudyPlan app, which allows learners to organise their revision by helping them create their own study plans. Where learners experience any challenges with exams taking place at the same time, centres are provided with Coincident Exam Reports as mentioned in section 1.3. If there are any challenges preventing a learner from sitting an exam at the scheduled start time, they (or their representative) are encouraged to discuss these concerns with the centre as soon as possible to determine whether a change to the start time of the exam or sourcing an alternative exam venue (if travel arrangements and journey times are contributing factors) is possible. This may be helpful to learners who are required to make alternative caring arrangements who want to sit their exams at the same time as their peers. We also recognise the key points from the Minimum Digital Living Standards (MDLS) research on households with children and the minimum standards all households should have, which affect all age groups, including: • access to digital goods and services, such as broadband with sufficient reliability and speed, • data allowance, • suitable devices such as a smartphone and a laptop, tablet or PC, and • suitable functional and practical digital skills to access relevant reliable information safely and ethically. For families who do not currently meet MDLS, this could have an impact on whether learners and their families are able to access news and updates about the 2027 timetable. Further discussions with Marketing and Communications colleagues

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	will be held to ensure that while digital communications are key in a progressively digital world, we also need to ensure that there are options for individuals to access this information in other ways, such as printed copies on request.
	Foster good relations
	We do not anticipate that the process of scheduling exam timetables will have impact on relations between learners from different age groups. In directly communicating with learners, centres, parents and carers, we intend for learners to experience peer support from their own communities. This includes sharing information about two exam timetable and learner apps mentioned above. We also ensure there is diversity in any imagery or examples used in documentation to represent diverse learners from all age groups and avoid stereotypes.
Disability	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	Feedback received as part of the provisional timetable consultation suggested that there were concerns about impacts on disabled learners and those with additional support needs. This includes: • The amount of extra time in place as an assessment arrangement reducing the 30-minute break between papers, leading to shorter recovery time. • Consideration of individual disabled learners' needs and cognitive load and potentially the need for a longer break between papers. • Resourcing challenges for centres such as having an appropriate supply of ICT devices, readers, scribes and rooms to accommodate the increasing number of assessment arrangements needed for disabled learners and those with additional support needs. While it can be challenging to meet the individual needs of diverse disabled learners, including those with intersecting identities, we have made efforts to alleviate the need to sit multiple exams on one day as much as possible. 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. 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. This can include, for example, allowing them to

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	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.
	For the 2027 timetable, more than 95% of all learners only have one exam scheduled on each day. We have also considered learner exam workload, ensuring that the ratio of learners who are sitting exams five days out of a period of six days is below 1%. We achieve this by scheduling high-demand exams with sufficient breaks in between, where possible, and avoiding clustering multiple exams within short timeframes. While specific analysis on the distribution of disabled learners is not available, we expect the majority of disabled learners and those with additional support needs will only be required to sit one, or a maximum of two, exams in a day, and that they are not expected to sit exams five days out of a period of six days.
	For disabled learners who may need a significant amount of extra time in exams, we offer the option to sit as much of the exam as they are able to through EECCS, or in some cases if a learner was unable to sit the exam, the centre can access EECCS on their behalf.
	In 2026, we changed our EECCS 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. 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.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	As explained above, centres can request existing services on behalf of disabled learners or those with additional support needs, such as the change of timetable process or EECCS. Learners, including disabled learners, highlighted that they had lower levels of satisfaction with communications about grades, assessment and awarding in 2024–25 in the NQ 2023–24 research (available on the NQ experiences page along with other research and engagement reports). While not specifically asked about communications related to the exam timetable, it highlights a need for us to consider the language and accessibility of communications directed at learners. This is important for empowering disabled learners and those with additional support needs to experience equality of opportunity with accessing the same information as their peers.
	Foster good relations
	As explained above, a range of existing services are available such as change of timetable and alternative venue processes. Our records show that in 2026, approximately 28% of change of timetable requests received were due to assessment arrangements.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	We have also received feedback from Qualified Teachers of Deaf Children and Young People that parents, carers and family members (who may be deaf themselves, or have deaf children and young people) want to understand any information that relates to the learner's education. A request can be made to our Customer Contact Centre (phone 0845 279 1000 or email customer@qualifications.gov.scot) to request any information relating to the timetable to be translated to British Sign Language. We are considering how to ensure learners and families are aware of these services. There is also an opportunity to develop Qualifications Scotland colleagues' awareness of disabilities and how the needs of disabled learners and those with additional support needs may impact on the timetabling process. We will improve the awareness and understanding of our colleagues involved in the process by engaging with groups and organisations representing a variety of disabled learners for inclusive feedback.
Race	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The TAG highlighted the importance of equity for diverse learner populations in the timetabling process. The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of race or ethnicity, though we understand there may be culturally significant periods in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities that may impact on learners' exam experience.
	We have carried out desk-based research to investigate whether significant cultural events associated with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities may impact on learners' ability to sit exams. However, to date, none have been identified that would impact on the 2027 timetable.
	Learners from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities may be sitting exams in their first language (that is, Modern Language exams) as well as ESOL. They would be impacted if these exams were scheduled at the same time on the same date, so we made sure to avoid this in the scheduling of the timetable. For the 2027 exam timetable, National 5 and Higher ESOL exams have been scheduled on their own and not on the same day as any Modern Language exams. We have not received any concerns through our regular feedback channels or through the provisional timetable consultation that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or victimise Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic communities. However, we recognise that in not collecting demographic data for the consultation, we can't determine whether learner's feedback differed according to their race.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Centres can submit requests on behalf of learners with English as an additional language to access a bilingual dictionary in the exams with additional time except in English, ESOL and exams in their first language.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	We also recognise that Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners may experience bullying or discrimination because of their race. According to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, 3990 charges relating to race crime were reported in 2025–26, a 17% increase compared to 2024–25. Temporary disability arrangements could be requested to allow the learner to complete their exams in separate or small group accommodation, for example, or to have breaks if needed. In these instances, where 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. We will continue to improve the awareness and understanding of our colleagues involved in the process by engaging with groups and organisations representing a range of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities for inclusive feedback. We will also engage with groups and organisations representing Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic learners and their families to understand any specific impact of cultural needs on the timetabling process, and invite them to contribute towards future provisional exams timetable consultations.
	Foster good relations
	We recognise that while learners sitting our exams in English would have a sufficient level of English acquisition, they may be speaking other languages at home. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities have expressed that parents, carers and family members want to understand any information that relates to the learner’s education. A request can be made to our Customer Contact Centre (phone 0845 279 1000 or email customer@qualifications.gov.scot) to request any timetable information in another language.
Religion or belief	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	We do not currently collect or have access to data relating to learners’ religion or belief. In reviewing religious holy days or festivals that take place between March and June, those that impacted on considerations of timetabling included: • Christianity: Easter or Holy Week (21 March to 29 March 2027), Ascension Day (6 May 2027) and Pentecost (16 May 2027) — many of these dates are observed as public holidays in the UK • Judaism: Pesach (or Passover, 21 to 29 April 2027) and Shavuot (10 June to 12 June 2027) • Islam: Ramadan (7 February to 8 March 2027) and Eid al-Adha (17 May 2027) • Sikhism: Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Ji (8 June 2027) and Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev Sahib (16 June 2027) • Hinduism: Akshaya Tritiya (9 May 2027) • Buddhism: Vesak or Wesake (20 May 2027) • Bahá’í: First day of Ridván (21 April 2027), Declaration of the Báb (24 May 2027) and the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh (29 May 2027)

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	We understand that any work is prohibited on the first, eighth and last days of Pesach and Shavuot for Jewish people, the first day of Ridván for followers of Bahá'u'lláh, Sabbath for Seventh Day Adventists, and Sunday rest for many other Christian denominations. The eighth and ninth (last two) days of Pesach and the first day of Ridván for followers of Bahá'u'lláh in particular may have an impact on the 2027 timetable as Sabbath and Sunday rest are weekend observances. To date, we have not received any indication that there are any learners observing Bahá'í faith who would be impacted by the provisional timetable. We noted that for some learners who may be observing holy days or festivals during the exam period, that these are not necessarily all-day events and may be linked to the lunar-solar cycle. In these instances, if a learner needs to attend events of festivals at specific times that coincide with a scheduled exam, we encourage them to discuss with their centre the possibility of requesting a change of start time for the exam. Pesach for observant Jewish learners 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. 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. We recognise that keeping these exams on the last two days of Pesach would mean that observant Jewish learners would be disproportionately impacted compared to their peers of agnostic, religious or belief communities. They would not have the same chance of demonstrating their knowledge, understanding and skills. 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

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	festivals or dates they observe, it is still possible that observant Jewish learners may be entered for Gàidhlig, and will remain impacted. Eid-al-Adha for observant Muslim learners After the provisional timetable consultation concluded, a centre 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, ESOL and Chemistry) in the provisional timetable would have an impact on observant learners. After receiving feedback from the provisional 2027 timetable consultation, we reviewed the scheduling of exams and made changes. 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. 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, 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.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	We understand that this will have a negative impact on observant Muslim learners entered for Mathematics. If a learner's Mathematics exam coincides with Eid-al-Adha celebrations, they can speak with their centre to discuss requesting a change of timetable or EECCS. Antisemitism, Islamophobia and religious hate crime Feedback also suggests that learners may be uncomfortable with disclosing their religion or belief to their school and that we should consider reviewing our 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. 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

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	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. Fair and equitable awarding 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.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	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. Improvements for future engagement Going forward, we intend to include optional questions for all respondents to provide us with equality data, to better monitor the needs of learners observing significant festivals or events linked to their religion or belief. We will create an internal calendar with dates of significant religious holy days and festivals, and the significance of these on those observing these dates, which will be updated annually. We recognise that Pesach, for example, potentially coincides with future exam diets every three to four years. We will also carry out further investigations to ensure that we consider future occurrences of other significant holy days, festival and events. We will consult with faith-based organisations to understand any impact of religious observances on the timetabling process. We will also invite them to contribute towards future provisional timetable consultations for inclusive feedback. We hope these actions will help build our colleagues' confidence in implementing more inclusive planning procedures by considering the needs of learners observing significant religious holy days or festivals. Advance equality of opportunity For learners who need to attend events on holy days or festivals which coincide with the published start and end times of exams, we encourage them to discuss with their centre the possibility of requesting a change of start time for the exam. We hope that the timetabling decisions taken for 2027 would advance equality of opportunity by making sure learners can sit their exams on the same dates as their peers. We recognise that there may still be some observant Jewish learners entered for Gàidhlig and observant Muslim learners entered for Mathematics, who would still be impacted by our timetabling decision. However, having no exams scheduled for two days between the end of April and June would not only impact on our procedures, but also centre resourcing to accommodate exams being held on other days. In addition to this, we are currently in the process of reviewing our process for scheduling exam timetables. We have developed a set of NQ Exam Timetable Planning Principles which includes:

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	• We recognise that religious observance may affect a learner's ability to sit an exam on particular dates. We must consider whether the national exam timetable could create indirect disadvantage for learners from any religion or belief group. • Given the scale and complexity of the timetabling process, it would not be practicable to avoid all major religious festivals or observances. However, we recognise that we should apply a consistent equality-based approach to all significant religious observances. This means identifying relevant dates, assessing the likely impact on learners, considering alternatives, weighing this against national timetable constraints, and recording the rationale for any decision and, where necessary, mitigations for unavoidable negative impacts. • We must apply a transparent and proportionate framework which considers the needs of learners observing a religion or belief, and the impact of this on the scheduling of the exam timetable each year, to ensure we comply with our Public Sector Equality Duty. • Where practicable, we will avoid scheduling exams on the most significant religious observance days where, for example, work, study, sitting exams, travel or in-person attendance may be impacted. Where this is not practicable, we will document the rationale, including the operational constraints, the learner numbers affected, the alternatives considered, and any mitigation available. These principles will be piloted with the scheduling of the 2028 provisional exam timetable to better understand how they will work in practice. Feedback from the consultation will help us determine whether they are effective in considering the needs of learners from equality groups. Foster good relations We hope that existing measures previously mentioned will foster good relations not only between learners of different religions or beliefs, or those who are agnostic, but also encourage more open dialogue and communication with groups, charities and organisations representing learners of different faiths. This also enables us to build on our corporate values of being open and connected.
Sex	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010 The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their sex. The TAG has pointed out that subject choices can influence equity between males and females. For example, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics sectors are often dominated by males, while females are more likely to choose social subjects such as History, Modern Studies, Psychology or Sociology. This was considered in the extensive internal analysis carried out for the provisional timetable, in order to mitigate concerns over the clustering of subjects with entries from the same sex, which would disadvantage one sex.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	Advance equality of opportunity
	There may be instances in which females are disproportionately affected on exam performance on the day in general, such as migraines (which affects women three to four times more frequently than men; Rossi et al., 2022), or impact of symptoms relating to their menstrual cycle, which could be exacerbated by Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD). As challenges linked to menstrual cycle differ between individual learners, it is not possible to schedule an exam timetable that would take these into account. Girls and women are also more likely to be tasked with caring responsibilities compared to boys and men. This could add to their stress and impact on their ability to focus on studying if, for example, those they are caring for require their attention. They might also need to secure alternative caring arrangements in advance of exam dates.
	Centres can request existing services on behalf of learners who may be experiencing the above challenges, for example, temporary disability arrangements such as breaks, separate or small group accommodation, or access to medication, food and drink, heat pads or TENS devices to alleviate any pain and discomfort. If a learner expects to experience symptoms worst at specific times of the day, or if they are unable to secure alternative caring arrangements for the scheduled start time of an exam, they could speak with their centre to discuss potentially changing the start time of the exam. If needed, there is also the option for the centre to submit an EECCS request on their behalf.
	We understand that girls and women may be uncomfortable with having conversations about their menstrual cycles or symptoms. However we do not (and cannot) know the needs of every learner and whether their centre has sufficient resources to accommodate any support needed. It is for this reason we advise learners (or their representatives) to discuss their needs with the centre as soon as possible to consider possible support to give them an equal opportunity to complete the exam as much as possible. However, where they are unable to do so, EECCS will ensure they are still awarded a grade based on alternative academic learner evidence and any other completed externally assessed components.
	Foster good relations
	As explained above, there may be instances in which girls and women are disproportionately affected compared to boys and men, for example, in relation to caring responsibilities or the menstrual cycle.
	For girls and women who are affected, we hope that in discussing their concerns with trusted friends or family, they will feel supported and speak with their centre to ensure that their needs are met during the exam period.
Sexual orientation	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	victimise learners or other individuals based on their sexual orientation. We recognise that we have not been able to determine whether learners' feedback to the provisional timetable differed according to their age group. According to LGBT Youth Scotland's 2022 Life in Scotland research, 70% of LGBTQ+ learners who experienced bullying felt that it had a negative impact on their educational experience, with 46% sharing that it impacted on their educational attainment. If a learner is impacted by incidents of bullying before or during the exam diet, centres can request existing services on behalf of them. Available support includes requesting temporary disability arrangements such as breaks or separate or small group accommodation. If a learner knows they may not be able to attend an exam at the scheduled start time for whatever reason, they could consider speaking with their centre to discuss potentially changing the start time of the exam. Centres also have the option to source another venue to allow the learner to sit their exam if they experience bullying and the other party is sitting the same exams. This can be done by submitting an alternative venue request. Lastly, where a learner's performance on the day of an exam has been impacted by any circumstances outwith their control (such as incidents of bullying), or they were unable to sit the exam on the day, the centre can also submit an EECCS request on their behalf. LGBTQIA+ organisations such as Time for Inclusive Education (TIE) and LGBT Youth Scotland can also help us understand impacts from future provisional timetables that disproportionately affect LGBTQIA+ learners that should be considered as part of the process.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	Putting in place the mitigations mentioned above gives LGBTQ+ learners an equal opportunity to complete the exam as far as possible. However, where they are unable to do so, EECCS will ensure they are still awarded a grade based on alternative academic learner evidence and any other completed externally assessed components. We will also consider improving how we highlight available support for LGBTQ+ learners when we publish the exam timetable. To ensure any information and materials we produce are inclusive for LGBTQ+ learners, we will ensure any imagery or visual content includes diverse representation of learners from all equality groups. This includes using gender neutral language and avoiding the use of only binary pronouns in any materials we produce.
	Foster good relations
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their sexual orientation. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has any differential impact in fostering good relations between learners based on their sexual orientation.
Gender re-assignment	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
(Gender identity and transgender)	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their gender identity or trans status. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or victimise learners or other individuals based on their gender identity or trans status. We recognise that we have not been able to determine whether learners' feedback to the provisional timetable differed according to their gender identity.
	According to LGBT Youth Scotland's 2024 Life in Scotland: Trans Report, 72% of 1279 participants between the ages of 13 and 25 felt that transphobia is a 'big problem' in Scotland. In addition to this, 1 in 5 trans participants have left education because of their experiences of transphobia.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their gender identity or trans status. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that there are any differential experiences of the timetable between cisgender and LGBTQIA+ learners. If a learner is impacted by incidents of bullying before or during the exam diet, or require time to attend medical appointments, centres can request existing services on behalf of them, such as temporary disability, alternative venues, change of timetable or EECCS. Putting in place these mitigations gives LGBTQ+ learners an equal opportunity to complete the exam as far as possible. However, where they are unable to do so, the EECCS ensures they are still awarded a grade based on alternative academic learner evidence and any other completed externally assessed components.
	Foster good relations
	For LGBTQ+ learners who are affected directly or indirectly by circumstances outwith their control, we hope that in discussing their concerns with trusted friends or family, they will feel supported and speak with their centre to ensure that they are fully supported during the exam period. They could also be accompanied by a representative who may advocate on their behalf. This would foster good relations between LGBTQ+ learners who experience such challenges and their cisgender peers. It would also enable all to better understand how bullying, discrimination and stigmatisation impacts on LGBTQ+ learners, and encourage others to advocate on their behalf to foster more inclusive environments.
Marriage / civil partnership	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their marital or civil partnership status. We do not anticipate that the process would discriminate, harass or victimise learners or individuals on the basis of their marital or civil partnership status.
	Advance equality of opportunity

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their marital or civil partnership status. We do not anticipate that the process would have any differential impact on learners or individuals on the basis of their marital or civil partnership status.
	Foster good relations
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their marital or civil partnership status. We do not anticipate that the process would have any differential impact on learners or individuals on the basis of their marital or civil partnership status.
Pregnancy / maternity	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their maternity or pregnancy status. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or victimise learners or other individuals based on their pregnancy or maternity status.
	Due to the number of competing factors we must consider when scheduling an exam timetable, and the unpredictable nature of when a baby may be born, it is not possible to schedule an exam timetable around any learners who may be pregnant, need to feed or require time to attend medical appointments.
	We recognise that as pregnancy is over a 40-week period, a learner's feedback based on their experience may only reflect their views at that particular stage of pregnancy. For example, learners who are pregnant for the first time and are in their early stages of pregnancy may not be able to accurately identify any potential impacts in their second or third trimesters. On the other hand, learners who have already had children previously may be able to offer useful insights based on their previous experiences with pregnancy and maternity.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	As explained above, centres can request existing services on behalf of learners affected. This includes requesting temporary disability arrangements such as breaks to feed their newborn child or pump breast milk in separate or small group accommodation, breaks to combat fatigue or any discomfort, and access to any medication they may need, potentially request changing the start time of the exam, or sourcing another venue such as at home or the hospital if they are on bed rest or have just given birth. As mentioned above, if a learner's performance on the day of an exam has been impacted by any circumstances outwith their control (such as side effects due to giving birth, prescribed medication or surgery), or they were unable to sit the exam on the day, the centre can also submit a request for EECCS on their behalf.
	Putting in place these mitigations gives pregnant learners and new parents an equal opportunity to complete the exam as far as possible. However, where they are unable to do so, the EECCS ensures they are still awarded a grade based on alternative academic learner evidence and any other completed externally assessed components.

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	We will also consult with organisations that represent people in pregnancy or maternity, such as SANDS, One Parent Families Scotland and Life Charity, to understand if there are impacts from future provisional timetables that disproportionately affect learners in pregnancy or maternity that should be considered as part of the process.
	Foster good relations
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their pregnancy or maternity status. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has any differential impact on learners based on their pregnancy or maternity status.
	For learners in pregnancy or maternity who are affected by circumstances outwith their control, we hope that in discussing their concerns with trusted friends or family, they will feel supported and speak with their centre to ensure that they are fully supported during the exam period. They could also be accompanied by a representative who may advocate on their behalf. This would foster good relations between learners in pregnancy or maternity and their peers. It would also enable all to better understand the experiences of these learners, including an awareness of any discrimination and stigmatisation they experience with accessing support, and encourage others to advocate on their behalf to foster more inclusive environments.
Care experience (where relevant)	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
	The timetabling process should apply equally to all learners, regardless of their care status. To date, we have not received any feedback or concerns from our stakeholders that the process has the potential to discriminate, harass or victimise care-experienced learners.
	Going forward, we intend to include optional questions for all respondents to provide us with equality data, to better understand whether there are any concerns relating to the scheduling of exams due to a learner's care status.
	Advance equality of opportunity
	As learners may experience a change in their circumstances at any point of the year and at short notice, including attendance in court or Children's Hearing appointments, it is not possible to create an exam timetable that would allow us to schedule exams around sudden change in care-experienced learners' circumstances. However, as explained above, centres can request existing services on behalf of them, such as change of timetable, temporary disability, alternative venues and EECCS, which will give them an equal opportunity to complete the exam as far as possible.
	We will continue to liaise with organisations such as Who Cares? Scotland to understand and consider any disproportionate impact of the timetabling process on care-experienced learners. We will also invite such groups, charities and organisations to contribute towards future provisional exams timetable consultations for inclusive feedback. This will

Protected characteristic	General equality duty
	enable us to consider highlighting available support for care-experienced learners in information published alongside the timetable.
	Foster good relations
	For care-experienced learners who are affected by circumstances outwith their control, we hope that in discussing their concerns with their centre, they are fully supported during the exam period. Alternatively, if they have a trusted friend, family, mentor or adult they are comfortable discussing their concerns with, they could be supported when discussing their needs or accompanied to attend any meetings with the centre.

3. Weighing proportionality of impacts

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

We considered a number of factors in the scheduling of the 2027 timetable, as specified in previous sections:

- Learner entry data from the previous year
- Number of learners affected by coincident exams
- Public holidays
- Potential for total exam duration to exceed our guideline of six hours
- Number of learners sitting more than one exam each day
- Number of learners who may be sitting exams across five days over a six-day period
- Significant holy days and festivals and the impact on learners observing these religious events

Conflict with Pesach

We considered feedback from the Jewish Council of Scotland and Scottish Association of Jewish Educators regarding the Graphic Communication, Physics and RMPS exams provisionally scheduled on 28 and 29 April 2027. As mentioned above, these exams would have coincided with the last two days of Pesach, which would have a significant impact on observant Jewish learners. To remove this disadvantage, we decided to move these exams to alternative dates and replace them with lower uptake Gàidhlig exams at all levels.

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.

Conflict with Eid-al-Adha

As mentioned above, the scheduling of four high-uptake exams (History, Design and Manufacture, ESOL and Chemistry) in the provisional timetable would coincide with observance of Eid-al-Adha which starts from sundown of 16 May and ends at sundown on 17 May 2027, which would have an impact on observant Muslim learners. We reviewed the scheduling of exams and made changes. 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.

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.

Based on feedback received in 2026, the original date scheduled for Urdu would have had an impact on all observant Muslim learners which coincided with Eid-al-Adha which was between 26 and 29 May 2026. As a result of this feedback, Urdu was scheduled for an alternate date with other exams scheduled on this day. Following receipt of feedback from the 2027 provisional exam timetable consultation, a review of the scheduling of exams was carried out. As a result, the original four high entry exams were moved to alternative dates however we understand that Mathematics exams at all levels scheduled for 17 May 2027 will still have an impact on observant Muslim learners, as this date coincides with observation of Eid-al-Adha which starts from sundown of 16 May and ends at sundown on 17 May 2027. Based on desk-based research and speaking with those from the Muslim community, our understanding is that observant Muslim learners may be attending morning prayers and the sermon, as well as participating in any community gatherings afterwards.

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.

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. 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, 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.

Requesting mitigations for conflicts

We understand that the decision to schedule Gàidhlig and Mathematics exams on days that coincide with key dates for Pesach and Eid-al-Adha will have a negative impact on observant Jewish and Muslim learners respectively. As noted above, it has not been possible to move these exams to alternative dates. If an observant learner's exam coincides with events associated with Eid-al-Adha, they can speak with their centre to discuss requesting a change of timetable. This would still allow them the best possible opportunity to sit the exam. However we recognise that this option may not be a suitable option for all learners observing religious or holy days. If a learner was unable to sit an exam due to observance of religious or holy days or events, centres can submit EECCS requests on their behalf. This ensures they will still receive grades based on completed coursework components and any alternative academic learner evidence submitted by their centre.

Feedback also suggests that learners may be uncomfortable with disclosing their religion or belief to their school and that we should consider reviewing our 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. For example, learners may face discrimination, bullying or harassment for wearing any religious garments such as a kippah, turban, hijab, abaya or burka.

Learner-direct access to EECCS

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.

We do not ask for reasons why an EECCS request is submitted. We rely on a head of centre to establish that the learner 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 issues raised by mitigations

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.

Fair and equitable awarding

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 EECSS 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.

Conclusion

Going forward, we anticipate that having a set of documented NQ Exam Timetable Planning Principles will clearly define how our colleagues create exam timetables. Where a learner is unable to sit an exam for reasons outwith their control, the following services are available to:

- temporary disability arrangements such as, extra time, breaks, access to medication or separate or small group accommodation
- speaking with their centre to discuss potentially changing the start time of the exam
- sourcing an alternative venue to allow the learner to sit their exam, such as at home, a community centre or other suitable venue, or
- accessing EECCS (this also applies if their performance on the day has been impacted by any circumstances outwith their control)

Along with additional supporting documentation to ensure we have considered all potential impacts on learners from equality groups, this will enable colleagues to continue to build on existing procedures, and improve inclusive decision making with provisional exam timetables. We will continue to monitor the process through feedback from provisional exam timetable consultation activity, as well as our standard channels for enquiries and complaints.