



# **Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements: Consultation with schools, colleges and training providers**

Publication date: May 2025

Published by the Scottish Qualifications Authority  
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# Introduction

The purpose of assessment arrangements is to provide disabled learners and those with additional support needs with appropriate support to access SQA's assessments, without compromising the integrity of the assessment itself.

As Scotland's awarding body, SQA has a duty to ensure that our centres (schools, colleges and training providers) have appropriate internal verification processes so that assessment arrangements are only provided to learners with an identified need. In taking a needs-led approach, we recognise that not all learners with the same disability or additional support need will require the same type of support. It is the individual needs of the learner that is at the heart of our assessment arrangement process. We rely on the professional judgement of centres to identify the most appropriate assessment arrangements for each learner who need them.

Our [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres \(SQA, 2025\)](#) is intended to support centres to ensure they have a robust verification process in place for providing assessment arrangements. Quality assurance of assessment arrangements (QA of AA) visits are designed to ensure that to ensure our evidence requirements are being followed, to clarify any misunderstandings when this is needed, and to identify and promote best practice. With the delegated responsibility given to centres to ensure assessment arrangements are provide on our behalf, the visits provide reassurance that centres, and SQA, are compliant with relevant equality legislation.

Centres are responsible for:

1. Informing all staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation to quality assurance of assessment arrangements.
2. Identifying, as early as possible, any difficulty a disabled learner might have in demonstrating their attainment through the published assessment procedures.
3. Determining the most appropriate assessment arrangement for the learner.
4. Establishing the learner's need for the assessment arrangement in an internal or external assessment.
5. Authorising assessment arrangements.

All of these stages must be documented, implemented and monitored by the centre to meet our QA of AA requirements.

SQA's Equalities and Research & Evaluation Teams (within the Policy, Analysis and Standards Directorate) conducted focus groups with local authority and centre staff as part of a review of the delivery of assessment arrangements, with the [full report published](#) in November 2024 ([SQA, 2024a](#)). As part of that research, practitioners whose centre had recently taken part in a quality assurance (previously called 'audit') visit were asked about their experiences. We received a wide range of feedback, some of which was positive. For example, participants reported that the visits were supportive and provided a valuable opportunity to clarify evidence requirements. However, there were also a number of constructive comments, with many describing the visits as a stressful, bureaucratic and intensive experience.

As a result, we decided to engage further with our centres and other key stakeholders to review our current approach to the quality assurance of assessment arrangements. The purpose of the

review is to ensure the process is supportive, does not introduce undue burden on centres, that there is consistency in the experiences of centres visited, and that it meets the needs of different centre types.

The aims of the project were to:

- ◆ Better understand how SQA's approach to quality assurance can be improved to meet the needs of each centre type and
- ◆ Provide a more consistent and supportive experience for centres.

This report summarises the findings from the focus groups and surveys we carried out in 2024 with schools, colleges, training providers and other key stakeholders about the quality assurance of assessment arrangements.

# Methodology

The research was carried out in two phases. In the first phase of the research, we carried out focus groups with a smaller number of schools, colleges and training providers. In the second phase, we administered online surveys that were open to all schools, colleges and training providers.

## Phase 1: Focus Groups

Schools who had a QA of AA visit between 2019 and 2024 were randomly selected to participate in the research. Centres are selected for a quality assurance visit based on several factors including the length of time since the last quality assurance visit, size and type of the centre, geographical location, how many late requests were submitted and compliance with deadline dates.

Of the 200 schools who had a visit in the last five years, 122 were invited to participate in the research via their SQA co-ordinator. Participants from eight mainstream local authority schools took part in a focus group or an interview about their experience of the QA of AA process from 1 to 11 October 2024. These sessions were facilitated by members of the Equalities and Research and Evaluation Teams from the Policy, Analysis and Standards Directorate.

The eight schools included two rural schools and one school located in SIMD quantile 1. Participants had a variety of roles including: teachers; SQA co-ordinators; senior managers; and equality and inclusion or learning support staff. We also spoke to a representative from Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS). Independent secondary and special schools were also invited, but none of the special schools or independent schools we contacted responded to our invitation.

In addition, a random selection of colleges that had and had not been recently selected for a quality assurance visit were invited to participate in the focus groups. Sixteen participants across 10 colleges took part in three focus group sessions.

A random selection of 21 training providers that had had systems verification since the start of 2023, were also invited to participate in a focus group session. Of these 21, only two training providers responded. Due to one not being able to attend the scheduled session, an interview was held with one training provider instead. It is important to note that the training provider who participated in the interview currently offers only one National Course. The assessment arrangements implemented for the National Course has only been required for homework, written assessment and practical tasks completed at the centre rather than the practical component for that course. Although they have recently been approved to deliver HNVQs, they are not offering these and do not have learners enrolled in them yet. Their feedback may not reflect the experience of other training providers who offer other SQA qualifications.

Qualitative analysis of the focus group transcripts was conducted by members of the Equalities and Research and Evaluation Teams, using NVivo to code the data and identify themes. Any identifying information about the participants has been redacted from the quotations used in this report.

## Phase 2: Surveys

The findings from the focus group sessions were used to inform survey questions we developed for all centres. We administered the survey online using Smart Survey. The purpose of the survey was to generate robust quantitative data across a larger sample size in addition to the rich qualitative data gathered from the focus groups in the first phase. We also included a small number of open-ended questions to complement the quantitative findings.

Participants were first recruited through survey advertisements in SQA News. Recruitment was initially low through this method, and so participants were also recruited through their SQA co-ordinator.

Overall, there were 89 responses to the survey from schools. However, 7 respondents were eliminated from the sample for not completing the required consent or not meeting the criteria of being involved at any stage of the QA of AA process. Because they were ineligible, these participants were routed to the end of the survey. In total, 82 eligible school participants submitted responses that were analysed for the purposes of this report. To maintain anonymity, the survey did not collect information on which schools participants worked in.

There were also 27 college responses to the survey for colleges and training providers. One respondent was eliminated from the sample for not completing the required consent or not meeting the criteria of being involved at any stage of the assessment arrangement process. This participant was routed to the end of the survey.

In total, 26 eligible college participants and four training provider participants submitted responses that were analysed for the purposes of this report. To maintain anonymity, the survey did not collect information on which colleges or training providers participants worked in.

The majority of survey questions were on a five-point Likert scale. Likert scales included:

- ◆ two terms of positivity (for example 'strongly agree' and 'agree')
- ◆ two terms of negativity (for example 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree')
- ◆ a neutral term (for example 'neither agree nor disagree')

Other survey options were analysed in terms of the overall proportion of participants who gave each response. All outcomes are shown as the percentage of respondents who answered that question. Charts are labelled with data if the proportion of survey responses was over 10%. In the tables, the count of respondents is given. The responses from training providers were too few to report through charts and tables. However, where applicable we have noted where the responses from training providers differ from colleges.

In the school survey, across most closed questions, at least 78% of participants responded. The only exception to this was question 25, which asked participants to rate the extent to which they agreed that the feedback from quality assurance visits were helpful; this is noted in the analysis.

For colleges and training providers, responses to closed questions were mixed. Less than half (50%) of the total participants answered closed questions related to assessment arrangement FAQs; Feedback; getting information from partner centres; and removing QA of AA visits or 'audits'. This is likely due to a low number of participants who worked with partner centres, and read the assessment arrangement FAQs or centre feedback. Although only 50% of the total

participants answered questions about gathering evidence, this is proportional to the number of participants who indicated they were not involved in this stage of the QA of AA process and were excluded from answering questions on this section. However, of the 13 participants who were eligible to answer routed questions about gathering evidence, 100% responded.

Some survey questions allowed open-text responses. Open-text responses were analysed using qualitative content analysis techniques, with line-by-line coding carried out using NVivo. Researchers identified themes in the data in order to produce codes which then allowed for analysis across responses.



## Limitations

Due to the small sample size of the focus groups with schools, colleges and training providers, we are unable to report on the geographical representation of the centres.

Although the school survey yielded participants across 23 of 32 local authorities, the sample size was not large enough to consider the data at a local authority level. In addition, the following local authorities are not represented in the survey data at all:

- ◆ Angus
- ◆ Argyll and Bute
- ◆ East Ayrshire
- ◆ East Lothian
- ◆ Moray
- ◆ Orkney
- ◆ Shetland
- ◆ South Ayrshire
- ◆ Na h-Eileanan Siar

In addition, independent and special schools were not well represented in the sample. Results from this report may be more representative of the experience local authority secondary schools and may not be representative of those from independent or special (local authority and independent) schools.

Based on the geographical regions provided in Table 3, it is anticipated that not all college regions were represented in this survey. While the data may be representative of some or a majority of colleges, it cannot be assumed that the views and outcomes from the surveys are representative of all colleges.

## Survey sample characteristics

### Schools

Over 4 out of 5 survey respondents were involved in the evidence-gathering process to support assessment arrangements requests; establishing a learner's assessment arrangement need; working with disabled learners and those with support needs; and identifying where a learner may have difficulty demonstrating attainment; and determining the most appropriate assessment arrangements for a learner (Table 1).

*Table 1: Proportion of assessment arrangement processes participants take part in at their schools*

<b>Are you involved in any of the following processes within your school?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Gathering evidence in support of assessment arrangements requests	71	86.6%
Establishing a learner's need for an arrangement in an internal or external assessment	69	84.1%
Working with disabled learners and those with additional support needs	68	82.9%

Identifying any difficulty a learner might have in demonstrating their attainment	68	82.9%
Determining the most appropriate assessment arrangement for a learner	66	80.5%
Informing staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the quality assurance of assessment arrangements	54	65.9%
Verifying assessment arrangements	53	64.6%
Submitting assessment arrangements to SQA for National Courses (National 5 to Advanced Higher)	47	57.3%

Although all types of schools were represented in the survey, the majority of participants worked at local authority secondary schools (Table 2).

*Table 2: Proportion of participants' school types*

<b>What type of school do you work in?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Local authority secondary school	64	78.0%
Independent secondary school	11	13.4%
Local authority special school	5	6.1%
Independent special school	2	2.4%

Schools across 23 local authority areas were represented in the sample. Schools in Edinburgh and Glasgow had more responses than any other local authority area; approximately 1 in 5 participants worked in Glasgow City (Table 3).

*Table 3: Proportion of participants' school locations by local authority*

<b>Where is your school located?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Glasgow	19	23.2%
Edinburgh	8	9.8%
North Lanarkshire	5	6.1%
Aberdeenshire	5	6.1%
Fife	5	6.1%
South Lanarkshire	5	6.1%
Dumfries and Galloway	3	3.7%
Aberdeen	3	3.7%
East Renfrewshire	3	3.7%

<b>Where is your school located?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Renfrewshire	3	3.7%
Falkirk	3	3.7%
Highland	3	3.7%
Inverclyde	2	2.4%
East Dunbartonshire	2	2.4%
Scottish Borders	2	2.4%
Midlothian	2	2.4%
North Ayrshire	2	2.4%
Perth and Kinross	2	2.4%
West Dunbartonshire	1	1.2%
Stirling	1	1.2%
West Lothian	1	1.2%
Clackmannanshire	1	1.2%
Dundee	1	1.2%

Participants in various job roles were represented in the sample. Most (69%) of respondents were teaching or senior management staff. Staff who ticked 'other' than the options given were SQA co-ordinators; Principal Teachers of Support for Learning; faculty heads; and middle management.

*Table 4: Proportion of participant roles*

<b>Which of the following best describes your role?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Teaching staff	37	45.1%
Senior management staff	20	24.4%
Learning Support staff	7	8.5%
Pupil Support Assistant	1	1.2%
Other	17	20.7%

In terms of experiences with SQA's quality assurance visits, just under half (48%) of participants came from schools who had a visit within the last five years. Nearly a third (32%) of respondents were not sure if their centre had been selected for a visit in this period, while 1 in 5 (20%) respondents had not been selected.

*Table 5: Proportion of participants whose school had a QA of AA visit within the past five years*

<b>Has your centre been selected for an 'audit' or quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit conducted by SQA in the past five years?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	39	48.1%
Not sure	26	32.1%
No	16	19.8%

## Colleges

The majority of the respondents (81%) had experience working with disabled learners and those with additional support needs (Table 6). Around half of respondents were involved in the evidence-gathering process to support assessment arrangements requests; establishing a learner's need for assessment arrangements; identifying where a learner may have difficulty demonstrating attainment; and determining the most appropriate assessment arrangements for a learner.

*Table 6: Proportion of assessment arrangement processes participants take part in at their colleges*

<b>Are you involved in any of the following processes within your school?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Determining the most appropriate assessment arrangement for a learner	15	57.7
Establishing a learner's need for an arrangement in an internal or external assessment	16	61.5
Gathering evidence in support of assessment arrangements requests	13	50.0
Identifying any difficulty a learner might have in demonstrating their attainment	16	61.5
Informing staff of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the quality assurance of assessment arrangements	13	50.0
Submitting assessment arrangements to SQA for National Courses (National 5 to Advanced Higher)	10	38.5
Verifying assessment arrangements	12	46.2
Working with disabled learners and those with additional support needs	21	80.8

Colleges across 11 local authority areas were represented in the sample. Colleges in Glasgow, Fife and the Highlands had more responses than any other local authority (Table 7).

*Table 7: Proportion of participants' college locations by local authority*

<b>Where is your college located?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Angus	1	3.8
Argyll and Bute	1	3.8
Dundee	1	3.8

<b>Where is your college located?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Fife	6	23.1
Glasgow	7	26.9
Highland	5	19.2
North Lanarkshire	1	3.8
Orkney Islands	1	3.8
Perth and Kinross	1	3.8
Renfrewshire	1	3.8
Shetland Islands	1	3.8

Half of respondents were lecturers/curriculum staff, and 30% were learning support staff (Table 8).

*Table 8: Proportion of participant roles*

<b>Which of the following best describes your role?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Assistive technology	1	3.8
Learning Support staff	8	30.8
Lecturer/curriculum staff	13	50.0
Quality team staff	3	11.5
Senior management staff	1	3.8

Ten of the respondents worked in colleges that had been selected for SQA's QA of AA visit in the last five years. Around half of the respondents were not sure if their centre had recently been selected (Table 9). It is important to note that visits to colleges, employers and training providers (ETPs) had not been carried out since 2021.

*Table 9: Proportion of participants whose college had a quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit within the past 5 years*

<b>Has your centre been selected for an 'audit' or quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit conducted by SQA in the past five years?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	10	38.5
No	1	3.8
Not sure	15	57.7

Around a third of the respondents worked in centres that were in partnership with other centres (such as school-college partnerships) to deliver SQA qualifications (Table 10).

*Table 10: Proportion of participants whose college works in partnership with other centres*

<b>Do you work in partnership with other centres to deliver SQA qualifications on their behalf?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes	9	34.6
No	11	42.3
Not sure	6	23.1

## **Ethical considerations**

This research was carried out in accordance with the ethical principles set out in SQA's Code of Research Practice ([SQA, 2023](#)). We took measures to obtain voluntary informed consent from participants, including providing participant information by email for focus group participants, and making this available on the Smart Survey introduction page for survey participants. Participants were only able to participate in focus group sessions after providing consent to participate. Survey participants were also required to provide consent on Smart Survey before they could proceed, otherwise they were disqualified from participation.

Focus group participants were asked to introduce themselves to create a welcoming environment for open discussion, but transcripts were pseudonymised for analysis purposes. Participation in the survey was completely anonymous, as we did not gather any personal information about participants. All the data collected was stored in a secure online location, which could only be accessed by researchers involved in the project. All participant data will be erased on completion of this research project.

# Focus group findings

## Schools

### **Schools both welcomed and felt frustrated by changes in SQA documentation**

In general, the feedback on the SQA documentation (specifically Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments ([SQA, 2025](#)) and the recently published frequently asked questions produced in collaboration with EIS ([SQA, 2024b](#))) was positive. While there are frequent references to the idea of the end-to-end quality assurance process being stressful, some participants described how SQA documentation reassured them about the process they have adopted in their schools.

There were positive discussions about SQA's recent collaboration with EIS to develop frequently asked questions about assessment arrangements:

'The new [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements] documentation that's come out and the new frequently asked questions and advice is now far, far better than it used to be. It's far more sensible and straightforward.'

An alternative view was frustration about how long it took to have these changes enacted:

'I think the process is turning around, but I wanted to come to the meeting to make clear, I think the direction of travel is really positive and it is strong, but not before time. I think this has been a process that has been very poor indeed for quite a long time. I'm glad it's better, but I think you need to hear that from us, or from me at least.'

'SQA has been telling us, in my experience as an SQA co-ordinator, for 13 years that we need to generate filing cabinets worth of evidence and now [SQA] is saying 'no no no no no'.'

Another participant said that a key issue with the QA of AA process is that SQA is 'fundamentally dishonest', and causes problems in the QA of AA process through changing policies around evidence and support, creating an environment that lacks clarity.

### **Some schools did not feel up-to-date with SQA information**

Many practitioners specifically referred to webinars and presentations before the quality assurance visit being helpful. However, in a different focus group, another practitioner mentioned that though the content of the webinar was helpful, it was not consistent with the written SQA documentation:

'I've been on webinars and people have asked these questions and I've been frantically screenshotting the answers because there were things that were not published but were spoken about. That meant that for folk who weren't in that webinar, [they] didn't have access to that information.'

To improve SQA documentation, a common theme practitioners fed back was the need for examples to provide greater clarity around the type of evidence that should be gathered.

Another theme that emerged was around the regularity in which SQA updated information. Some practitioners described not knowing about important updates that were in missed emails or having to find out about updates to SQA documentation through word of mouth. There were a few mentions of misinformation from SQA:

‘We get our weekly updates and everything through. Those are great, those are useful. I wouldn't say they weren't, don't stop them. But sometimes things do get missed. You know we're busy folk ... assessment arrangements are really, really important and nobody would want to miss anything or ask staff to be doing something they shouldn't.’

‘It feels a wee bit like sometimes they get drip fed and somebody tells you, ‘Have you seen that that's in?’ It's like, has that been snuck in and am I not up to date?’

‘I got given some advice [by SQA] over the phone and then I said OK could you put that in writing for me so that I've got a record. When the email came through it said sorry, I've misinformed you. By that point, I'd already done what I was told, so it's fine because we managed to smooth it out, but it was things like that. We just think, I imagine that you just need a really high level of understanding of the whole process. It could be a few years to get there and I imagine that's going to be the case where people do that.’

One school described how they used a network of SQA co-ordinators to keep up to date:

‘Anyone that is audited will come back in and feed their information into the group... People want to make sure that they are right up to the mark in how they're maybe collecting evidence or collecting pupil consent or there's good practice that other schools have used.’

Schools felt a consolidated list of all the updates to the guidance would be helpful. This also mirrors findings from the assessment arrangements evaluation research, which suggested that centre staff did not always read SQA documentation, or were not aware that updates were made to these.

### **Schools collect a large volume of evidence**

There was a consensus among participants that the evidence-gathering process was time consuming, mainly due to the volume of evidence needed:

‘It is a massive job. It takes up hours and hours of my week. As it gets closer to the exams, it gets tougher and tougher. I have three support members of staff who help to do the filing and make sure everything's in order. They all know what they're doing, but it takes an awful lot of time.’

‘I know from speaking to other SQA co-ordinators that there has quite long-held been a view that we seem to have to generate a filing cabinet per child almost. It is better now and again I think that needs to be acknowledged that they have changed and that is getting better.’



## **QA of AA is not always seen as a school-wide responsibility**

Staff involvement in the QA of AA process, especially teacher and senior management involvement, varied from school to school. One participant described that the evidence process is 'dealt with' by the Depute Head Teacher and the Faculty Head for Additional Support Needs and that it 'works really well'. Another participant described a 'whole school' meeting on the process indicating wider staff involvement. Practitioners described several meetings ahead of an assessment to co-ordinate assessment arrangements, with varying frequencies for example:

- ◆ Retrospective meetings to discuss what went well from the previous exam diet
- ◆ Weekly meetings in the lead up to the exam diet
- ◆ Daily meetings during the exam diet

The EIS representative indicated that though the evidence-gathering process involves a number of staff, how the QA of AA visits are organised makes it necessary for the workload to fall on only a few members of staff:

'Because it is up very much down to the individual teachers. It's their responsibility, right. But if the SQA are coming out to audit additional assessment arrangements, they're not going to come out and speak to those individual teachers and it's the person who they are going to speak to [that] feels the burden of responsibility to make sure that paperwork is in place.'

'Another secondary school that we have, it's a member of senior management who practically do everything, who do all of the paperwork. They take charge of it all. Whereas in other schools, in the school that I was in, it was pretty much left to me to do and the senior management was quite light touch on it... it's a very mixed bag.'

As a result, if the QA of AA process is not viewed as a school-wide responsibility, SQA documentation can go unused or be misinterpreted:

'We're still trying to battle with making sure people understand that is every teacher's responsibility. I think the workloads for teachers, all teachers, is so massive that it's just another thing that if they can put it onto somebody else, they will. But I think that whatever can be told to given to teachers in advance is for the better.'

One school participant describes using SQA documentation to emphasise the importance of the QA of AA process to other staff members:

'I suppose it helped us speak to staff. It helped us back up what we were already saying to staff about them providing evidence because it was coming from SQA and not just from little old me.'

## **The QA of AA process is especially demanding for some schools**

The burden of the QA of AA process was described as being especially difficult for schools with fewer staff or with staff who were going through the QA of AA process for the first time. There were many references to structural changes and staff turnover that contributed to this.

In addition, problems described by participants may indicate that rurality or geographic access to services play a role in the QA of AA experience. For example:

- ◆ School sizes, which related to the number of learners who need assessment arrangements. While resourcing for assessment arrangements was not considered a concern for a smaller school, schools with a larger school roll experienced difficulties ensuring there were enough staff to act as readers and scribes, for example.
- ◆ Resources for assessment arrangements, including evidencing the need for use of ICT and having suitable accommodation with power points to keep these running during an assessment, and having sufficient rooms for individual accommodation for learners who could not be in small group accommodation.
- ◆ GP workloads in certain areas, and how this creates an inability for learners to obtain medical notes as evidence to support their need for assessment arrangements. In the greater Glasgow area, for example, GP practices are not providing this information to learners, parents or carers.
- ◆ Parent and carer involvement might be expressed differently in different schools. For example, one participant described parent and carers as very vocal because of the geographical area they were in. No further information was provided by the participant to support their views.

### **The delivery of AAs has changed as more learners need mental health support**

Some practitioners felt the QA of AA process should become more 'realistic'. Their workload is impacted by the rising number of learners who needed assessment arrangements in place to support their mental health:

'The increase in young people who have anxiety-related issues creates a further burden. The guidelines about how you have that evidence is one thing, but the time that then creates for staff in terms of the organisation and administration... staff tend to give up a lot of their own time and that has a burden in other ways. Whilst people are trying to minimise the paperwork bureaucracy, the organisation of how do you find rooms, how do you get your class covered and on to doing it. That's a big issue and there is a significant increase, I would say, in the number of young people who have these kind of issues rather than dyslexia or extra time.'

One school described how they 'saved time' by not formally requesting small group accommodations for learners with anxiety as an assessment arrangement following advice from a QA of AA visit:

'We have an increasing number of [learners with anxiety] who perhaps might not appear on our [assessment arrangements] spreadsheets as much. But, the morning of the exam, you get the kids that just come in and can't do it, can't go in the hall. Well, come on, we've got people in the classroom. We'll just put you into the classroom and that reassured us that we weren't breaking the rules on that one.'

### **Schools can feel anxious in the lead-up to QA of AA visit**

Several respondents described feeling anxious or nervous before their scheduled QA of AA visit, but the experience was better than they expected. Many partly credited their liaison manager or QA verifier being supportive at various stages of the process:

'Really professional, really helpful, really supportive and accepted that there were failings in what we were able to deliver at that time'

‘It didn’t feel at all that we were being inspected or anything like that. It was very much how to help us in order to help the pupils; that we were clear on what our roles were, what we were putting in place for pupils and how to improve what we already had in place in school.’

The representative from EIS expressed similar views to school participants that the general strengths are that the QA of AA process has positive attributes, however also emphasised the ‘massive source of stress’ teachers may feel about the process:

‘I mean, to be honest, most people who I have spoken to, they say that the actual meeting itself goes well. I mean, the actual meeting itself is never as bad as they think it’s going to be.’

This stress may contribute to the EIS representative suggesting staff may ‘struggle’ with the idea of involving learners in an ‘inspection’.

### **QA of AA visit was described positively by participants**

Positive attributes of the visit were that the visit itself did not require a lot of work; the assessors were supportive and knowledgeable; and the visit provided school staff with the knowledge and understanding they needed to identify and provide assessment arrangements correctly for learners. In addition to this, participants pointed out that the visit was not or did not feel like an inspection or test, suggesting that they expected the visit to be more formal than it was in reality.

‘Again, it felt supportive, it didn’t feel like there was any suggestion of catching out or anything, just basically highlighting aspects of the policy and then asking questions round about it.’

School practitioners described their visit or assessors as:

- ◆ Fine
- ◆ Supportive
- ◆ Open
- ◆ Friendly
- ◆ Professional
- ◆ Knowledgeable
- ◆ Personable
- ◆ Helpful

The EIS representative said that staff may be ‘surprised’ that their assessors may not be teachers, or have teaching experience, which may have an impact on how knowledgeable teachers feel their auditors are:

‘I suppose, from [member’s] point of view, she had this feeling that maybe that person didn’t really understand what it was like to be in her position. It might make things easier if they felt that they did.’

A positive visit was linked to the school’s own preparedness for the visit; for example being prepared through the pre-visit webinar, having staff prepared for the visit, and having evidence organised prior to the visit.

‘Thankfully, when the auditors came, I was able to provide each candidate's evidence but I understand other schools do not follow that model. They maybe put files on to Teams and they don't have physical copies then on the day they would have to print it off and provide it to the auditor and things like that. I think our audit went well because we had the things at hand. I think that was part of the strength because we were able to lay our hands on it. There was no time gap, it was like within 10 minutes everything was there for that person.’

In terms of timings of the visit, when asked whether the QA of AA visit should continue to take place between September and December, no participant reacted to this strongly or negatively, and described the timing as ‘decent’ or ‘fine’:

‘I think that's probably a decent time if you're looking at the retrospective stuff, if you're looking at what's gone by the year before. It's probably fine because you've got everything to go back to. If you're looking at it live, there's not a lot of evidence.’

In addition, participants described variation in how long the visit took; one participant described their visit as taking place across two visits. The participant described having two different SQA staff carry out the initial and second visits, which suggests this school may have had a follow-up visit to review their progress with any required actions identified from the initial QA of AA visit.

### **Many schools used the robustness of the QA of AA experience to support delivery of AAs**

Participants described different strengths of the QA of AA process:

‘Like any quality assurance system, there's strength in standardisation, in sharing good practice, in providing a touch-point regularly — with some with some regularity, at least — to centres. To ensure that quality's been upheld across the country. Those would be the key strengths in any in any system.’

When feedback was mentioned directly it was ‘really useful’ and provided clarification:

‘They were all really, really supportive of what we were trying to do in school and helping me understand how the process worked and how we share that with our pupils, our parents and our staff as well.’

A few practitioners felt the QA of AA process helped to build confidence and validated their work:

‘The whole process clarified that what we were doing was good and what we were doing was the right thing to do and we were getting it right for the students, which is the main purpose of all of this.’

‘There's no doubt that I sleep soundly at exam time now, knowing that we've got it right for the youngsters because of that process that we've been through.’

Some participants also said that being able to select their learner evidence to discuss this with the auditor was helpful. This allowed them to clarify whether the evidence held for a specific learner met SQA's evidence requirements and that their decision-making process was robust:

‘For us, we felt that was really, really positive and it worked better than just saying, ‘Right, I want to have these six names and you go away’ which was what I was expecting.’

One participant indicated that the visit feedback was not entirely useful. They said that although the visit helped the school ‘be a little more thoughtful about how we looked at evidence’ and expressed positivity about the assessors as ‘generally supportive’, the visit did not give them any more confidence, and it ultimately did not result in any change to their assessment arrangement procedures. The participant had the experience of their centre not meeting all the quality assurance criteria; however, overall they were not negative about the process in general.

### **A few schools highlighted the importance of parents and carers understanding the QA of AA process**

The perceived legitimacy of the process (and SQA) helped a few participants to carry out their responsibilities when faced with opposition from parents and carers:

‘By having the audit process, we are able to say: look our system is robust, we trust our system and therefore your child is not entitled to additional arrangements or this is what we will do.’

A few schools suggested that ‘parent-friendly’ guidance could help them better explain QA of AA:

‘Parents are more and more aware of SQA documents. Where they can find those, they will phone and tell us what their children are entitled to.’

‘There was however many phone calls home because you need to explain to a parent that just because a child is dyslexic doesn't entitle them to extra time, we need to have evidence. That creates friction as well, between us and families. There's also the explanation that if they're getting separate accommodation and extra time for one assessment, but they don't need the extra time in another, why that is. Why isn't it just a blanket? It takes an awful lot of time to explain to families what we're actually trying to do.’

The assessment arrangements evaluation research presented similar findings. Centre staff who participated in the evaluation were not aware that SQA provided information about assessment arrangements to learners, parents and carers. Centres also felt that the QA of AA process they had to follow was not well-understood by parents and carers. Parents and carers had previously shared in our evaluation ([SQA 2024b](#)) that they felt they had to continuously advocate for their child's need for assessment arrangements.

### **Schools described several challenges in delivering appropriate assessment arrangements**

One of the largest elements discussed amongst participants was related to their roles and responsibilities in delivering assessment arrangements. Although the focus group and interview questions were geared specifically towards the QA of AA process, participants frequently went back to talking about assessment arrangements problems in general.

Problems about assessment arrangements brought up by participants were:

### **1. Identifying assessment arrangement needs**

- ◆ Practitioners discussed learners being involved in signing off their assessment arrangements or asking for assessment arrangements. There were some challenges around learners not wanting assessment arrangements, despite holding evidence to show that they are entitled to them. Additionally, how this relates to children's rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC). For example, some centres cited instances of parents or carers insisting on learners using the assessment arrangements they have been provided with, but the learners refused to use them.
- ◆ Workloads outside of assessment arrangements, which may make it easier to not see assessment arrangements as a priority or to try and place the responsibility elsewhere.

### **2. Determining the most appropriate assessment arrangement for the learner**

- ◆ There is an increase in learners with assessment arrangements needs, including an increase in mental health needs specifically and how to accommodate those learners.
- ◆ Workload and resources issues related to assessment arrangements, including staffing issues such as numbers of scribes and teacher cover; numbers of rooms needed; and IT.
- ◆ Centres' understanding of assessment arrangements; for example whether the same pieces of evidence can be duplicated across subjects.
- ◆ Assessment arrangements for learners with English as an additional language.

### **3. Establishing the learner's need for the assessment arrangement**

- ◆ Whether assessment arrangements are being used to address a wider exam problem. For example, whether learners could benefit from the removal of timed exams rather than extra time being used as an assessment arrangement, or, whether there are too many assessments in general.
- ◆ Fairness of assessment arrangements, where arrangements may be perceived as compromising the integrity of the demands of the assessment, for example in subjects like Drama or how to make adjustments for practical based assessments
- ◆ Whether assessment arrangements make the exam more burdensome for learners instead of less (for example, sitting exams for six hours or more for learners with complex needs).

## **Colleges**

### **Colleges recognise the importance of robust QA of AA practices and are confident in their internal policies and processes**

Colleges recognised the strengths of the QA of AA process in terms of ensuring that appropriate assessment arrangements are provided to those learners who need them. While there was considerable variation in how often colleges hold verification meetings (some monthly, others periodically), there seemed to be a consensus that verification meetings are robust and involve liaison across multiple teams. This streamlines the process for learners, ensuring that the assessment arrangements provided are suited to their individual needs:

'To make sure that the support that's been put in place for specific students is actually current, is accurate, is helpful. It's to make sure that there's ongoing reviews to make sure that the support is appropriate.'

‘...it makes sure that we deal with things on an individual basis. It makes sure that we’re reviewing things regularly. It makes sure we’ve evidence and stuff. It make sure we’ve got paper trail for auditing purposes. I think that would be the main benefits for me.’

Moreover, many colleges expressed their confidence in their internal policies and processes, which participants described as collaborative. Participants emphasised that staff members are experienced in their roles and work closely with one another:

‘I think... ours is really good. I work very closely with our Quality Co-ordinator. We got audited a few years ago and they came back and said your processes are crap, do it again. We’ve totally revamped it and our system works really well. Everyone knows what’s expected of them. My staff know what’s expected of them, the lecturers know what’s expected of them. It’s sometimes a challenge, as we’ve discussed. There [are] loads of challenges, but I think our process is very structured and very clear, and it means that there’s no unexpected rejection.’

Some participants also explained that their processes ensure that they can effectively identify learners’ needs for assessment arrangements as early as possible, and subsequently put suitable support strategies in place. This is achieved by having learners involved in the process throughout:

‘...we would encourage [learner] disclosure through application, enrolment right at the start of the year. [We] write to all students telling them what their support is, if they’ve got any concerns, how to disclose. We’ve got a referral form that’s quite obvious and quite accessible for lecturers and students to refer themselves as well. I think it definitely does help to ensure that disclosures are made as early as possible and the discussions can happen to organise support.’

One college also explained that they participated in transition meetings with local authorities for learners coming from schools, to ensure there was continuity of support:

‘We also get local authorities to invite us along to transition or TAC [Team Around the Child] meetings for any students who are coming from schools. Social work meetings as well. That’s another way we can get referrals and we can gather evidence if they invite us along to that transition meeting. The paperwork states on it, the student’s support needs and what arrangements have already been put in place, so that’s quite good as well.’

The training provider interviewed also recognised the importance of robust QA of AA practices. However, they were less confident of their internal policies and procedures and found that the process provided guidance and gave them confidence in their assessment arrangements process:

‘It helps us to provide the students the correct assessment arrangements that they need... We need the quality assurance through the school, through the SQA with our IV [Internal Verifier] and our co-ordinator to make sure the right assessment arrangements are in place for each child.’

This outlines a process that involves using evidence and support from elsewhere in a learner's education, something that is not available to colleges.

### **Some colleges feel that SQA guidance is unclear, and updates are not issued effectively**

Many participants shared experiences of finding information on the SQA website for the assessment arrangements process confusing. There were calls for consistency and having information in the same place on the SQA website, as well as making notifications of changes more prominent:

'The number of places that can sometimes be a wee bit confusing. If we could bring it all together, that would be really helpful. I see JCQ have something that looks really great. You can click here and it takes you to the bit that you need. Something like that would be fantastic.'

'Going back to the guidance, there is something about notification of change of key documents from SQA. We don't always find that out, you come across it by accident sometimes.'

Practitioners also shared an instance of receiving different information from webinars to what was then issued in advance of verification:

'Last year, we attended the assessment arrangements [webinar] on SQA Connect and ... we left it going, 'Yeah, great things are moving on and it's going to be looking good.' When it came to the verification time, we'd reverted back to the way it was. It had to be 100% sampling. We couldn't accept this as evidence, we have to accept that as evidence. We didn't really get notification about the change in the devices.'

One practitioner shared an example of when they felt the granting of assessment arrangements hadn't followed the guidelines, and how that experience negatively impacted their view of the quality assurance process and requirements:

'Another big challenge we have is that SQA will often just move the goal post at the last minute. For example, a student could pop up on the day before the assessment and say I want these strategies. You can say, well OK, you haven't used them the full year. Based on what SQA have said all year, we can't really put them in place. They'll [the learner] contact SQA, and they'll say [to the college] put them in place. You do all this work and all this QA work and loads of work and time and resources go into it just to be overruled from somebody who says I know I told you to do all this, but see if they just come the day before? Well, put it in place because they have dyslexia. Half the time you think and say, well, what's the point in doing all that QA work and all that work because somebody's going to contact them [SQA] and they'll say just put it in place.'

Other participants shared similar experiences, highlighting that the experience was demotivating for staff that had been involved with organising assessment arrangements.



## **The evidence-gathering process is particularly difficult in the college context**

There was consensus among participants that the evidence-gathering process is significantly more difficult in the college context. This is due to a number of reasons, including:

- ◆ the contact time that colleges have with learners
- ◆ the structure of college courses and assessment
- ◆ how colleges gather evidence compared to schools
- ◆ the distance learning courses that colleges provide

Many participants expressed the view that colleges do not have enough time to gather the necessary evidence to put assessment arrangements in place or to meet SQA's standards of quality assurance. One of the key differences was that colleges often do not see the students for a full week:

'One of the biggest constraints we have is time. Time to get to know the students and gather the evidence. Schools have got students from first year. They've got all this evidence, they're in all the different subjects. Students might only be with us three days a week. They're seeing different lecturers all the time. You go to a lecturer for feedback and they say, well, I only see them once a week so we don't have that time.'

'Lecturers can change every 12 weeks. You're going into a new block, you've got a brand new lecturer. They've then got to get their head around this brand new student with brand new support strategies and that may have to happen after two weeks and then that may change again after 12 weeks, going into block three and things like that. I totally agree it's very, very difficult for colleges to try and meet the expectations.'

This problem is then compounded by learners who are solely on distance learning courses. Participants expressed that this made evidence-gathering even harder, and was an element of SQA's QA of AA process that did not align with the range of courses and qualifications that colleges offer from a number of awarding bodies, not just SQA.

Another element of evidence-gathering that one participant raised was feeling 'at the mercy of external agencies' for assessment arrangements evidence:

'It's difficult to get evidence from our own academic teams sometimes, but we do have a little bit more clout that we can apply there. But when you're waiting maybe for a school or a support agency to come back, you really are at their mercy. If there was something we could do on that to help our support teams, that would make the biggest difference.'

In addition, some participants highlighted that having to collect evidence for a new needs assessment when a student is progressing on the same course, for example where a learner is progressing from SCQF Level 5 to 6, created unnecessary work:

'You've got to reassess them, which we do, and make sure that their arrangements are what's needed for them. Has anything changed?... What is the benefit [of doing this] every year? I think if we're getting feedback and we're doing reviews, is that not picking up? Why are we having to re-assess every single year? I don't know.'

Participants reiterated that when changing courses, re-assessment may be necessary but made this point regarding progressing through SCQF levels in the same subject.

### **Faculty engagement and curriculum feedback pose challenges for colleges**

Many colleges suggested that lecturers and teaching staff are not always engaged with the QA of AA process. Some participants expressed concern that faculty members do not 'understand that they've got a responsibility' in the process and believe that it is the sole responsibility of the Learning Support team. As a consequence, colleges can find it challenging to obtain the evidence that they need from faculty members who are 'understaffed' and 'pushed for time':

'Learning Support should be involved in some capacity, absolutely, but you can't do that without input from the people that are standing in front of the class and teaching. I think that sometimes people feel that's maybe not their priority to get that information to you. You made the recommendation in week one, week two, week three, and you'll go with that recommendation in week 12, week whatever it is. It's sometimes very tricky to put responsibility on them to give you the information that you require.'

Participants stressed the importance of input from faculty members who see learners in the classroom, to ensure that assessment arrangements mirror learners' usual way of working in the classroom. Without this input, it is difficult to identify learners' needs and determine the most appropriate assessment arrangements.

Some colleges reported that they have been implementing new systems and policies with the aim of tackling this challenge. In particular, participants explained that they were working to establish more collaborative processes involving faculty members and learners. One college described a new system that has been recently introduced:

'We've developed a system this year when we send out the student support plan, a version of it gets sent to lecturing staff. What lecturing staff used to say to us was, it felt like we were dictating to them from that document. It was like, here's a bunch of recommendations and you've got to put that in place. We've done a bit of work to try to say to them, this is a collaborative document... that they can now fill in as they're going through the year. It's not a thing that we're doing at the end where you're asking them to do it for these thirty students and resource is tight. It's a piece of work that now happens throughout the session. At any point within the year, under the heading AAAs, they can go on and leave us feedback on the AAAs that have been recommended.'

Other college participants set out similar approaches, using an online portal or faculty feedback forms, which have helped to build closer, more collaborative relationships with faculty teams.

### **Colleges feel that a separate QA of AA process is necessary**

There appeared to be wide agreement across colleges that the current approach to QA of AA is more suited to schools and does not work in the college context. As indicated above, colleges offer a wider range of qualifications from various awarding bodies compared to schools who mainly offer general qualifications from SQA or JCQ, and often have considerably less contact

time with learners. Colleges were clear that their infrastructure, including their learning, teaching and assessment environment, differs from schools and therefore their needs are different:

‘I feel that anytime I go along to any of the SQA things, it's very, very much school-focused. Maybe that is something that we need to get together and look at colleges separately because our learners are different.’

‘I think what I would say is square peg, round hole. That's kind of what we're trying to do in the colleges. Make it work for us, but it's very much a school model. Coming into a college, that doesn't really work for us at all. I think that's probably why it makes it so much more challenging and harder...why it's more of a difficult long process is because it's not a model fit for colleges.’

The academic year is also structured in a different way, with more frequent ongoing internal assessments throughout the year.

As such, there was overwhelming support for a separate way of working for colleges that is suited to their distinct needs. To achieve this, participants emphasised that there would have to be significant changes that address their specific challenges, particularly in terms of evidence-gathering, time constraints and gathering curriculum feedback:

‘But there would need to be changes. We couldn't still follow what's out there already, which is what our systems are trying to follow just now as in the curriculum feedback, the evidence gathering. I think, yeah, the internal audit would still need to change. There would have to be improvements there, but I do think it would be a good idea.’

The training provider who was interviewed felt that the process did work for them, both in terms of ensuring that assessment arrangements are being organised correctly and the verification processes. It is important to acknowledge that the training provider only offered one National Course at the time they were interviewed, and did not offer the full range of courses that colleges do. The training provider was ‘guided by’ assessments arrangements that were implemented by the schools, and therefore the experience of gathering evidence may not be comparable with colleges.

In particular, feedback from the training provider about SQA’s QA of AA visit was positive:

‘The audits and the visits we’ve always found very useful and the [SQA] staff that come up are always very informative, very supportive. We know that you're there to help us, to help us deliver the SQA qualifications. All of that has been very supportive and informative. I think whoever we've dealt with and has come and seen us has been helpful. I would say that that's been a good a good process.’

### **Colleges are generally supportive of the proposal to absorb QA of AA for colleges within the systems verification model**

Overall, colleges were receptive to the proposal to absorb the QA of AA process for colleges within the existing self-evaluation systems verification pilot model. Participants emphasised that having one single process would help to:

- ◆ streamline their work
- ◆ avoid duplication in evidence-gathering and paperwork
- ◆ alleviate some resourcing challenges

However, some suggested that this would only be beneficial if the single process is effectively rationalised to free up capacity. There were some concerns that it could otherwise be more resource intensive:

‘Having one system would be beneficial. However, as long as what we’re not doing is making the one system take up even more resource... If the whole point of it is to free up capacity so we can actually spend the time supporting students, rather than the admin side that goes with it, then I would be keen to look at one model.’

Others indicated specific support for a self-evaluation approach, as is currently used in the systems verification pilot introduced in 2023 for colleges, particularly as it would help to ensure greater consistency. It was highlighted that colleges can effectively and robustly self-evaluate, and that this would tie in well with their other processes:

‘I think colleges are really good at self-evaluating. That’s part of our regular routine activity and I think that was one of the strengths of the system’s verification process last time round. I could see this process feeding in quite naturally to that.’

This sentiment was shared across colleges, and echoed by one participant who also suggested that colleges would continue to ‘get much better at self-evaluation as they migrate towards that new quality assurance process.’

However, colleges emphasised that a move towards a self-evaluation approach would only be an improvement if it introduced fundamental changes in the evidence-gathering process. Participants were clear that any new process would have to be realistic and relevant in the college context and fit in with other self-evaluation processes such as the tertiary framework model. Otherwise, the same issues may continue to ensure, particularly in terms of resourcing:

‘The SQA guidelines would still have to be realistic for colleges, for the expectations of colleges. For example, just being blatant, if the SQA guidelines said you must gather evidence X, Y and Z, we’re still pretty much in the same boat.’

‘The self-evaluation tool would have to be relevant for their ability and the capacity of the individual colleges. The SQA guidelines couldn’t trump that because then it would just be following the same guidelines with the same problems.’

One participant felt that colleges would need more information about the proposed move to absorb QA of AA into systems verification to truly assess whether it would actually represent an improvement:

‘Would it be an additional self-evaluation on top of the self-evaluation for the tertiary framework? What would that look like? I think I would need to see what it looked like before we could say... because...we’re very good at self-evaluation. But are we going to self-evaluate burn out or would be able to cross map to say, there’s your evidence there from the big TQEF [Tertiary Quality Enhancement Framework] ... and the SEAPs [Self-Evaluation and Action Plans].’

Some colleges also explained that bringing QA of AA into systems verification would be supportive to college staff, particularly teaching staff who often must contend with multiple awarding body systems and requirements. One participant suggested that this could also be more conducive to faculty and teaching staff engagement with QA of AA by helping to improve collaboration.

Others also noted that a self-evaluation approach would essentially afford greater trust in the professional judgement of, and demonstrate SQA's confidence in, college staff in the assessment arrangements context. Ultimately, this show of trust from SQA could be extremely valuable, as one participant explained:

'If we could cut out some of the paperwork, the paper trails that are required, the auditing that's needed, the gathering of information that's required that's impossible, in some instances and be given more trust to just ensure that we can justify the things that we're implementing and that we can be trusted, that we are reviewing it and we're making adjustments where is necessary along the way, I think that would be very helpful.

There seemed to be a consensus that colleges are confident in their internal processes and policies and feel that the robustness of these is a major strength of QA of AA, as indicated above.

On the other hand, the training provider felt that the QA of AA and NQ external verification visits kept them 'in the loop' with SQA and the wider sector, and ensured that they were in line with best practice for the National Course they delivered:

'Having these verification visits and having these different policies is good for us to make sure we're delivering everything correctly.'

When probed further whether reducing one of the SQA processes would be helpful, the training provider did acknowledge that removing the duplication in evidence-gathering between SQA's QA of AA and systems verification processes could be beneficial to colleges and other larger training providers:

'It's putting it in one process, isn't it? Rather than, say, mirror another.'

### **Colleges described several challenges in delivering appropriate assessment arrangements**

Colleges reported a number of challenges in relation to the delivery of assessment arrangements in general:

- ◆ Increasing number of assessment arrangements requests, which has put greater pressure on staff members and is not sustainable for colleges, for example learners with poor mental health and anxiety.
- ◆ Difficulties with providing separate accommodation for learners who need it due to a lack of suitable rooms, particularly when this is requested at short notice.
- ◆ Increasing demand for readers and scribes, which colleges do not have the capacity to accommodate. Some colleges had to train internal staff to invigilate, which increased costs.

- ◆ Assessment arrangements requests being made at the last minute, which made it difficult to deliver arrangements on time (including sourcing invigilators, readers and scribes).
- ◆ A lack of suitable ICT devices that meet SQA's security requirements to accommodate all learners that need them.
- ◆ Difficulties with ensuring that appropriate assistive technologies can be used in assessment contexts, for example, screen readers not being compatible with SOLAR assessments.

A number of suggestions for tackling these challenges were offered by college participants, including:

- ◆ Introducing audio-recorded assessments that students can access using headphones, reducing the need for human readers and scribes.
- ◆ Permitting learners to use devices in assessments where it is their normal way of working, without the need to request these as an assessment arrangement. It is not an SQA requirement that only disabled learners and those with additional support needs can use ICT in assessments. We will further investigate how we can make it clear to centres that learners do not need to have an additional support need to use ICT, provided the centre can accommodate this arrangement. It is the centre's responsibility to ensure security requirements outlined in our ICT security checklist are adhered to.
- ◆ Reducing the number of closed-book assessments, which would help to alleviate resourcing issues, such as sourcing separate, individual accommodation for learners who are unable to complete assessments in small group settings.

# Surveys

## Schools

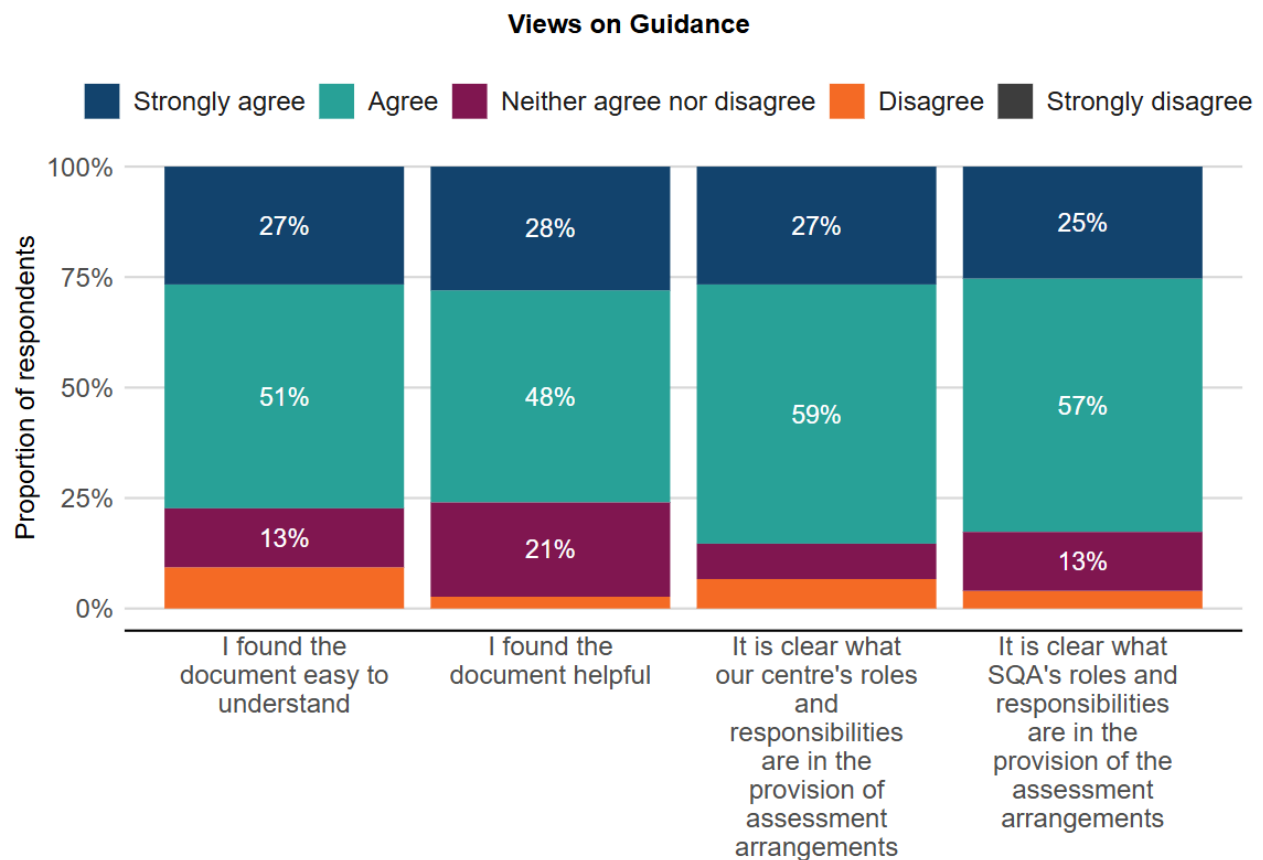
### Guidance

The majority of respondents (92%) had read [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres](#) (Table 11).

Table 11: Proportion of participants who have read the guidance

Have you read the guidance?	Count	%
No	7	8.5%
Yes	75	91.5%

Figure 1: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the quality assurance of assessment arrangements guidance



Of those who read the guidance, feedback was positive with 77% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that the guidance was easy to understand; 76% of participants agreed that the guidance was helpful; 86% of participants agreed that their centre's roles and responsibilities were clear; and 82% of participants agreed that SQA's roles and responsibilities were clear (Figure 1).

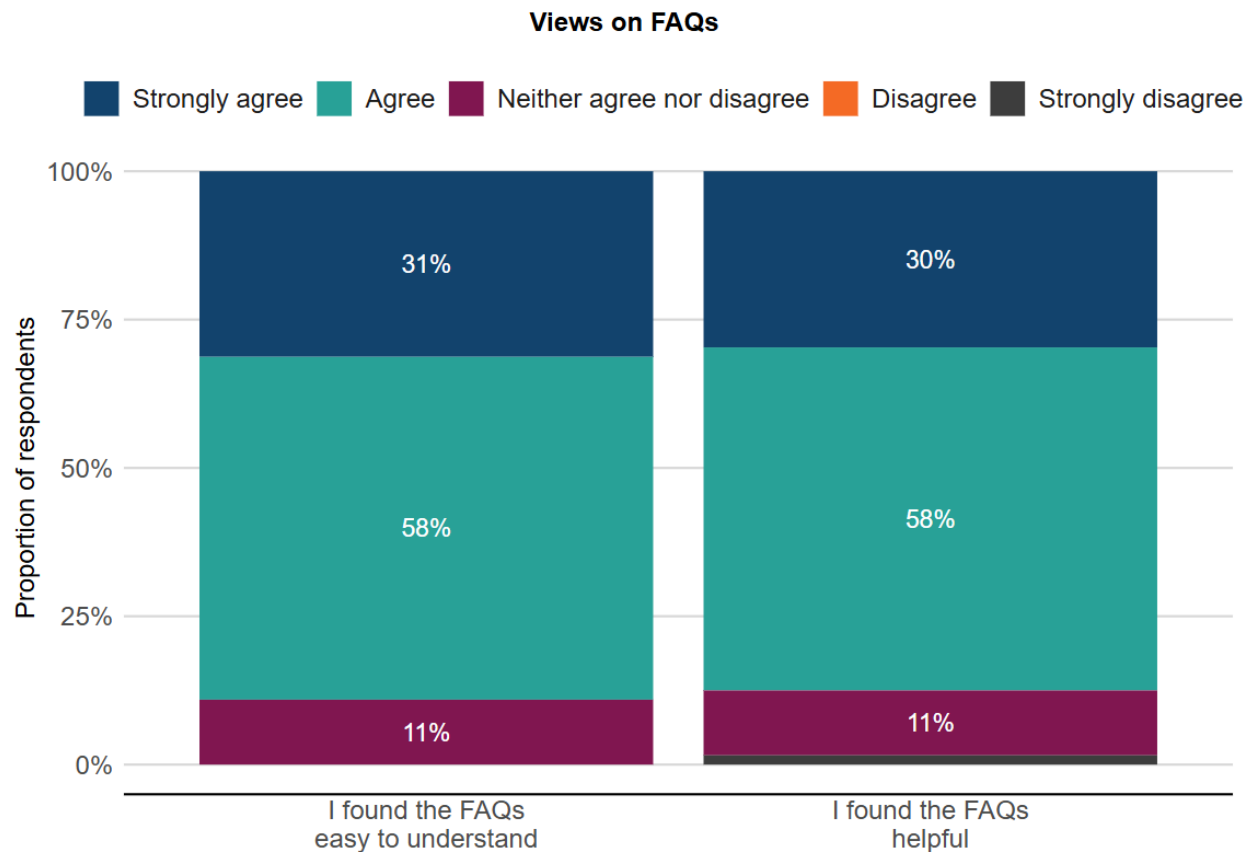
Fewer respondents had read the [Assessment Arrangements FAQs](#) (Table 12) ([SQA, 2024b](#)).

*Table 12: Proportion of participants who have read [SQA's Assessment Arrangement FAQs](#)*

Have you read Assessment Arrangements FAQ?	Count	%
No	18	22.0%
Yes	64	78.0%

Most of those who read the FAQs agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to understand (88%) and helpful (89%) (Figure 2). None of the participants disagreed that the FAQs were easy to understand, and only one participant disagreed that the FAQs were helpful.

*Figure 2: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the Assessment Arrangements FAQs*



71% of participants agreed they felt up to date on any changes made to the QA of AA process (Figure 3). However, only 54% of participants agreed that updates to the QA of AA process are communicated frequently enough (Figure 4). This suggests that although participants mostly



agree that they feel up to date with changes to the guidance, they may be less sure about how changes are communicated or about how frequently they feel changes should be communicated. This is supported by the number of open-text responses that suggested changes to communications or dissemination of information, which is broadly consistent with the findings from our focus groups.

*Figure 3: Proportion of participant responses to statements about changes made to the QA of AA process*

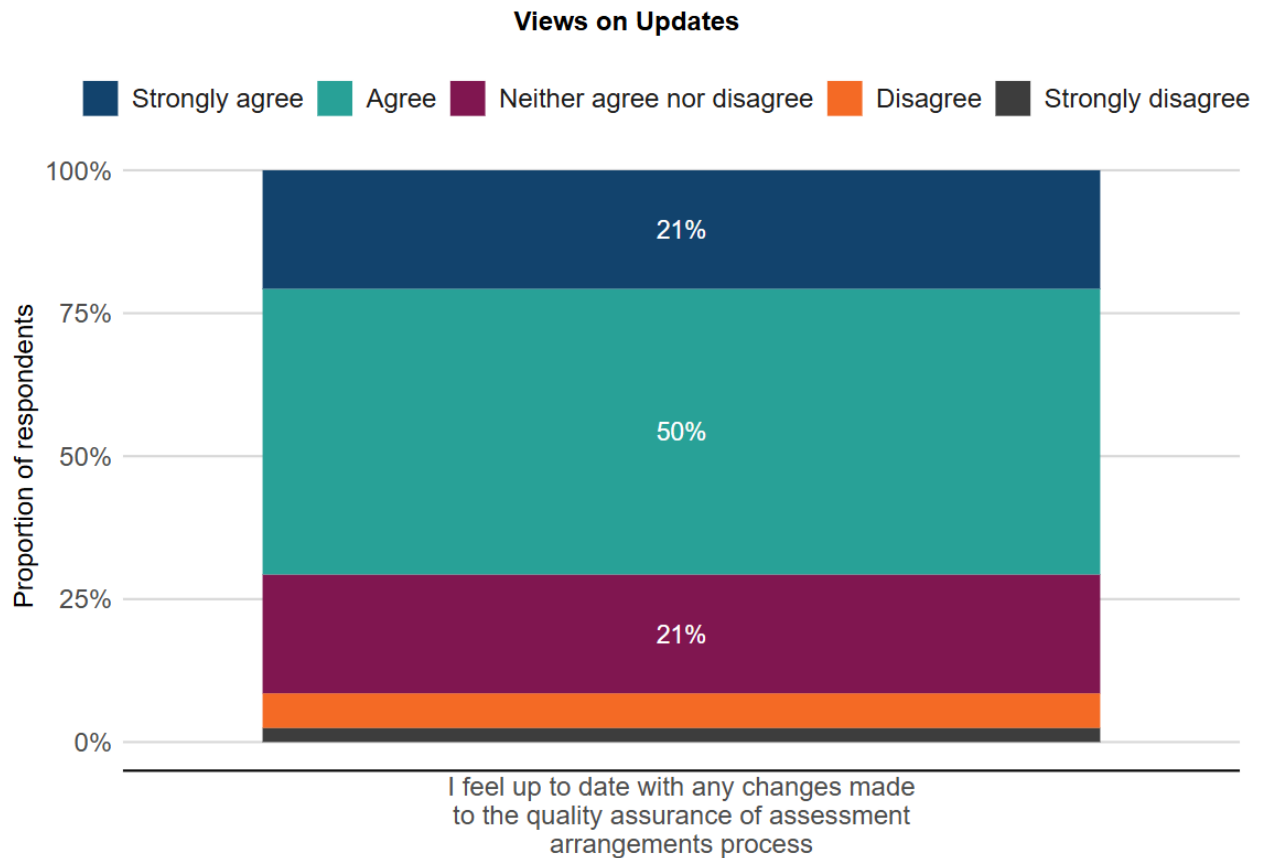
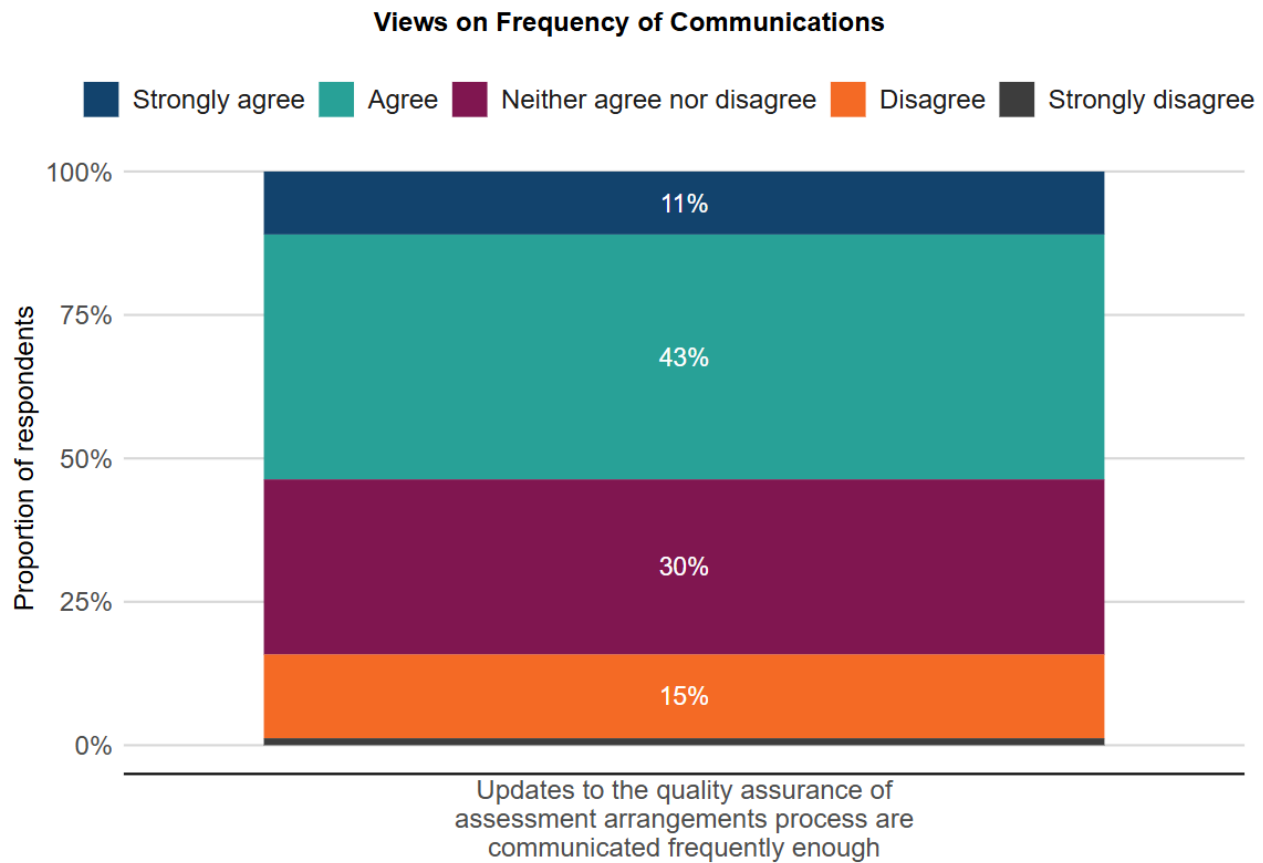


Figure 4: Proportion of participant responses to statements about updates made to the QA of AA guidance



Participants offered a range of suggestions for how SQA can improve our communications to ensure that centres are kept informed of changes in open-text questions:

- ◆ Running more regular Teams meetings, in-person meetings and webinars, or providing pre-recorded videos to communicate changes in a more engaging manner, allowing for greater professional dialogue.
- ◆ Clearly signposting any changes made to documentation, so that practitioners do not have to look for them specifically.
- ◆ Simplifying communications by breaking down important information into smaller chunks, using clearer and simpler language, using diagrams and flowcharts, and ensuring that all relevant information is in the same place and easy to navigate.
- ◆ Providing AA-specific updates or newsletters rather than subsuming within SQA News.
- ◆ Ensuring that a broader range of staff members are provided with updates rather than just SQA co-ordinators, including subject teachers and learning support staff.
- ◆ Publishing updated documentation earlier in the year.

## Roles and responsibilities

SQA's quality assurance of assessment arrangements guidance asks that all relevant staff across the school be involved in the quality assurance process for assessment arrangements ([SQA, 2025](#)). QA of AA should be seen as a school-wide responsibility, involving teaching staff, learning support staff and senior management, where all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in each stage of the wider process.

Participants who responded to questions about the importance of taking a whole-school approach in relation to given processes were nearly unanimous that it was of 'high importance' that staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities; that difficulties in demonstrating attainment are identified; that appropriate assessment arrangements are determined; and a need for the arrangement in an external or internal assessment is established (Table 13). Of these processes, no participants said they were of low importance.

The only process with more mixed responses was in relation to authorising assessment arrangements. 69% of participants said this was of 'high importance', but 6% of participants said this was of 'low importance'.

*Table 13: Proportion of participant ratings to taking a whole-school approach to different stages of the QA of AA process*

<b>Please rate the importance of taking a whole-school approach with each of the following stages in the quality assurance of assessment arrangements process</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% of all respondents who answered 'High Importance'</b>
Ensure all staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the quality assurance of assessment arrangements	77	95%
Identify any difficulty a disabled learner or a learner with additional support needs might have in demonstrating their attainment	76	95%
Determine the most appropriate assessment arrangement for a learner	76	94%
Establish a learner's need for an arrangement in an internal or external assessment	75	93%
Authorise assessment arrangements	56	69%

Given that focus groups participants suggested that QA of AA is not always seen as a school-wide responsibility, these findings may indicate a feeling that greater importance should be attached to the whole-school approach overall.

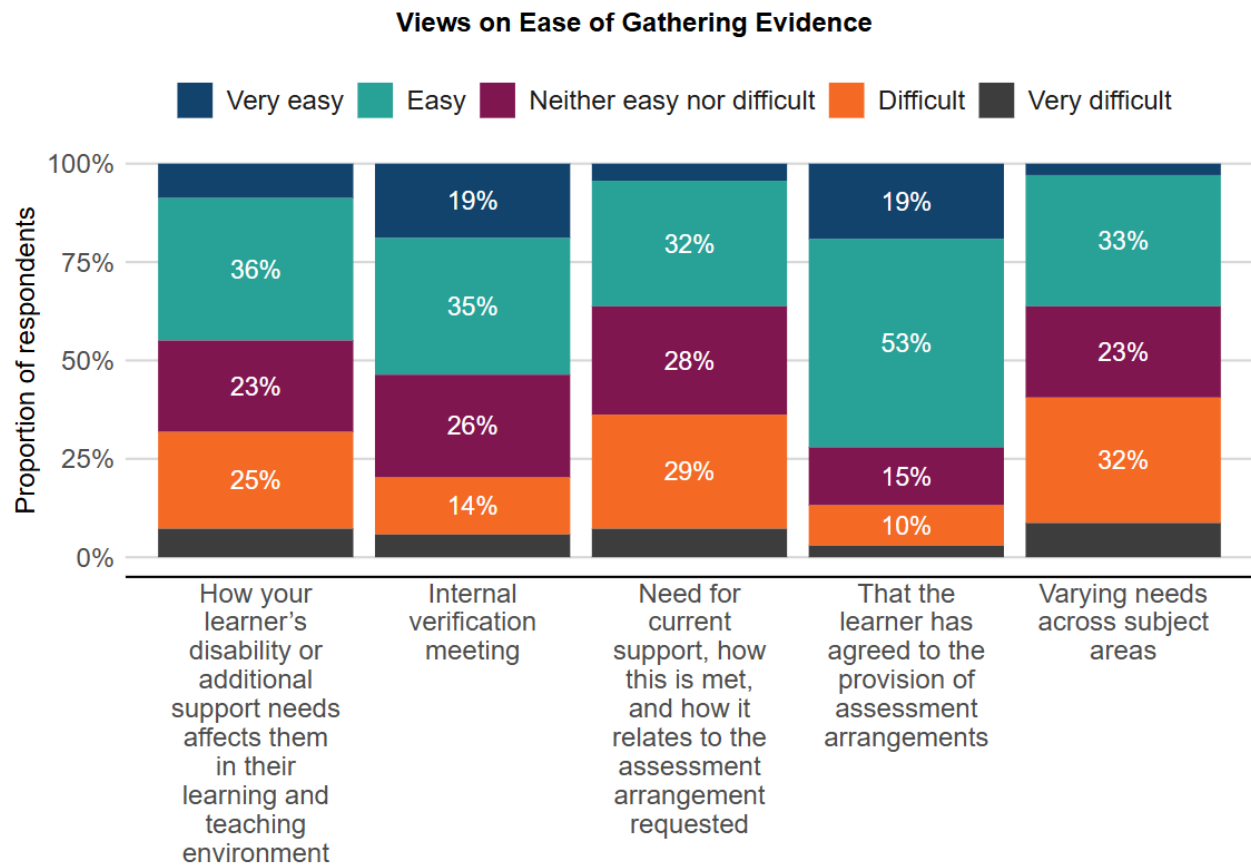
## **Gathering evidence**

Participants were less positive about the ease of some evidence-gathering processes. This may reflect the amount of time that participants spend on evidence-gathering processes, as expressed to us during interviews and focus groups. Across the various evidence-gathering processes asked about in the survey, on average, 49% of respondents considered them to be easy.

Participants found that gathering evidence to confirm learners have agreed to the assessment arrangements was the easiest stage of the QA of AA process (Figure 5). 72% of participants said getting the learner's agreement to the assessment arrangements provided was very easy or easy.

The most difficult process was gathering evidence for varying needs across subjects. Overall, 2 in 5 participants (41%) said this was difficult.

*Figure 5: Proportion of participants who responded that evidence-gathering processes are easy or difficult*

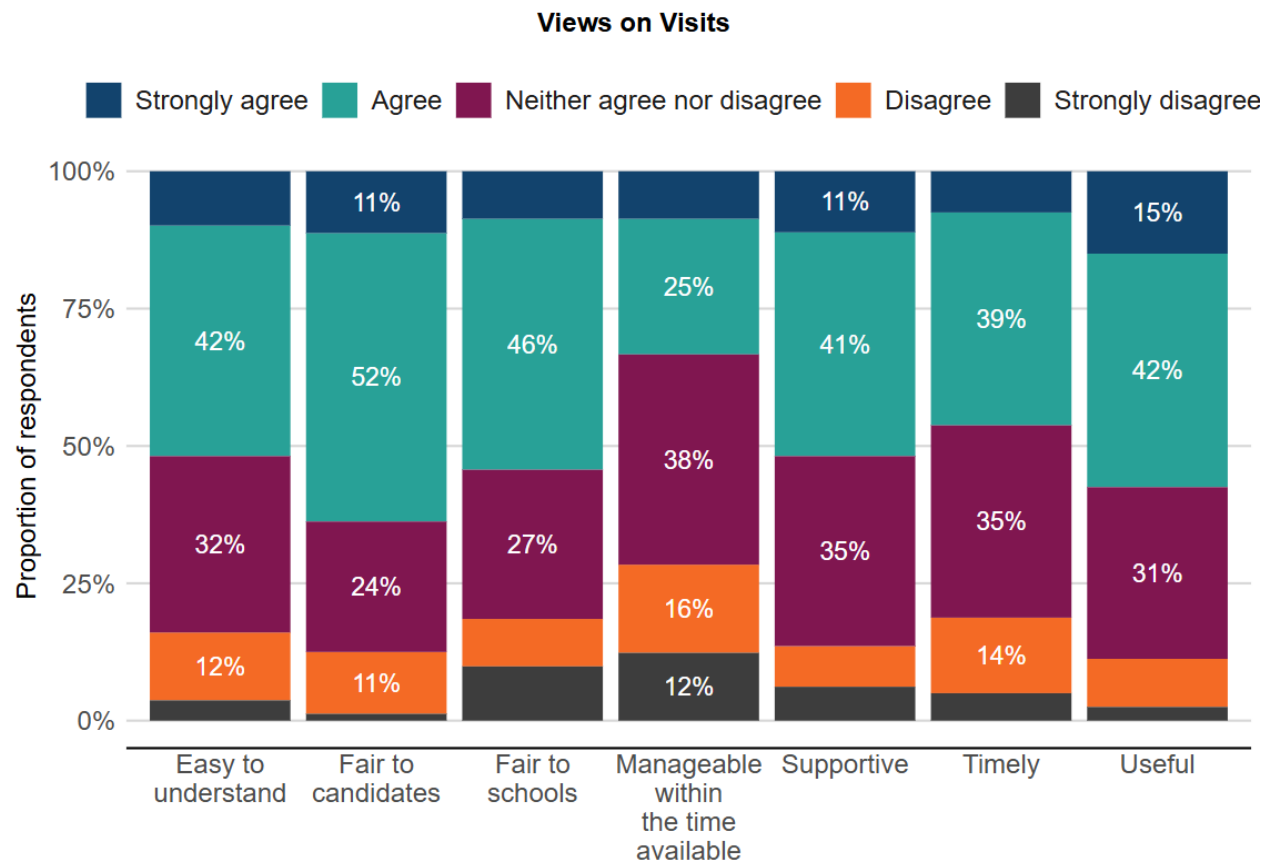


### QA of AA visits

Views on SQA's QA of AA visits were mixed. Participants were the most positive (66%) about visits being fair to learners (Figure 6). In addition, over half of participants agreed that visits were useful; supportive; fair to schools; and easy to understand. However, besides fairness to learners, at least 1 in 5 participants neither agreed nor disagreed with any of these statements, suggesting that a small but consistent proportion of participants may not have strong opinions about the visits.

The only statements about visits where less than half of participants were positive had to do with time. 19% of participants disagreed that visits were timely, and 28% of participants disagreed that visits were manageable within the time available.

Figure 6: Proportion of participants who responded to views on visits



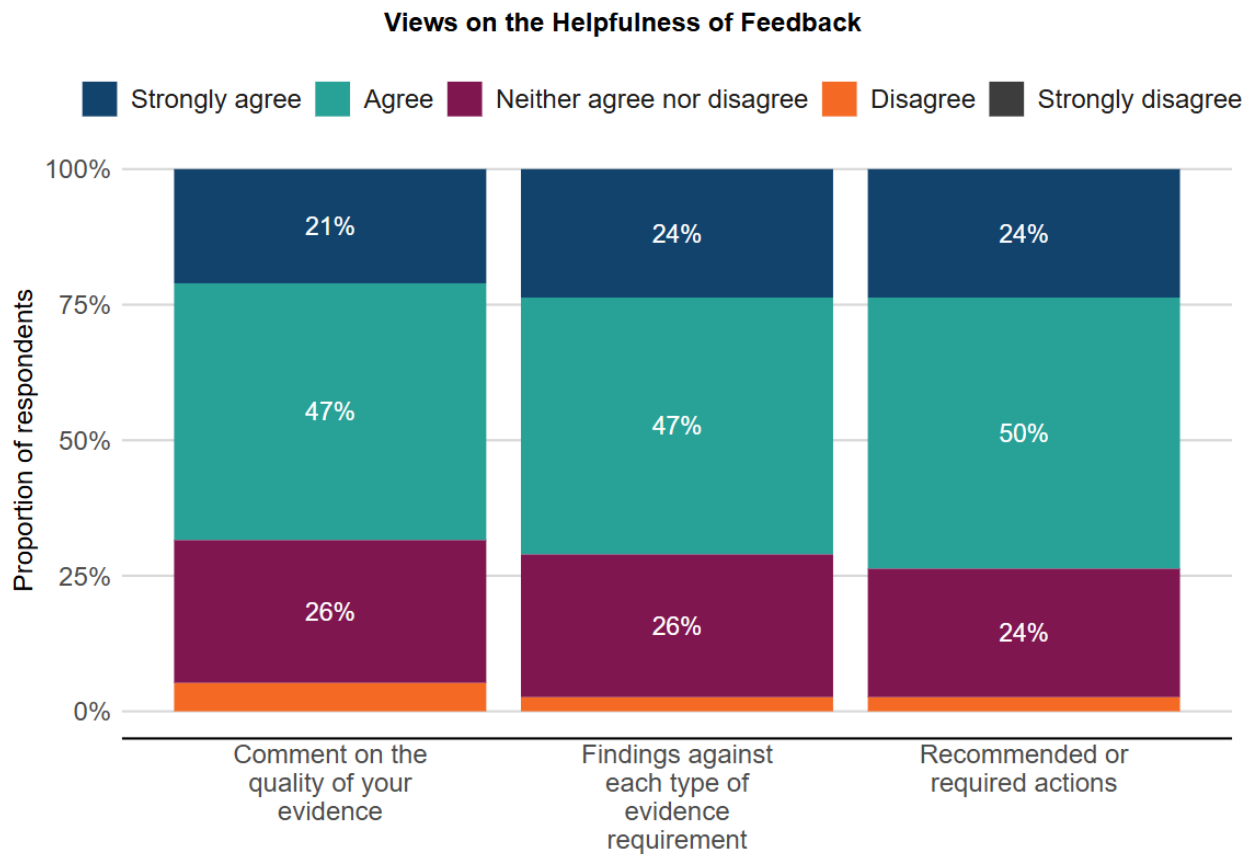
This broadly reflects the focus group findings to a degree, which were positive overall. However, generally speaking, participants expressed no strong feelings about when in the year visits should take place. Some participants also suggested that the manageability of the visits within the time available was linked to the school's preparedness. The experience was described as more positive and seamless when practitioners had, for example, attended the pre-visit webinar or had evidence organised in advance of the visit.

### Feedback from QA of AA visits

Only 46% of participants answered questions about the helpfulness of feedback (Figure 7). Of those who responded, participants were mainly positive. At least 2 out of 3 participants agreed that all statements about feedback were helpful. In particular, over 70% of participants agreed that feedback on recommended or required actions, and feedback on findings against type of evidence requirement were helpful.

1 in 4 (26%) of participants neither agreed nor disagreed that comments on the quality of evidence or findings against type of evidence requirement were helpful.

Figure 7: Proportion of participants who responded to views on the helpfulness of feedback

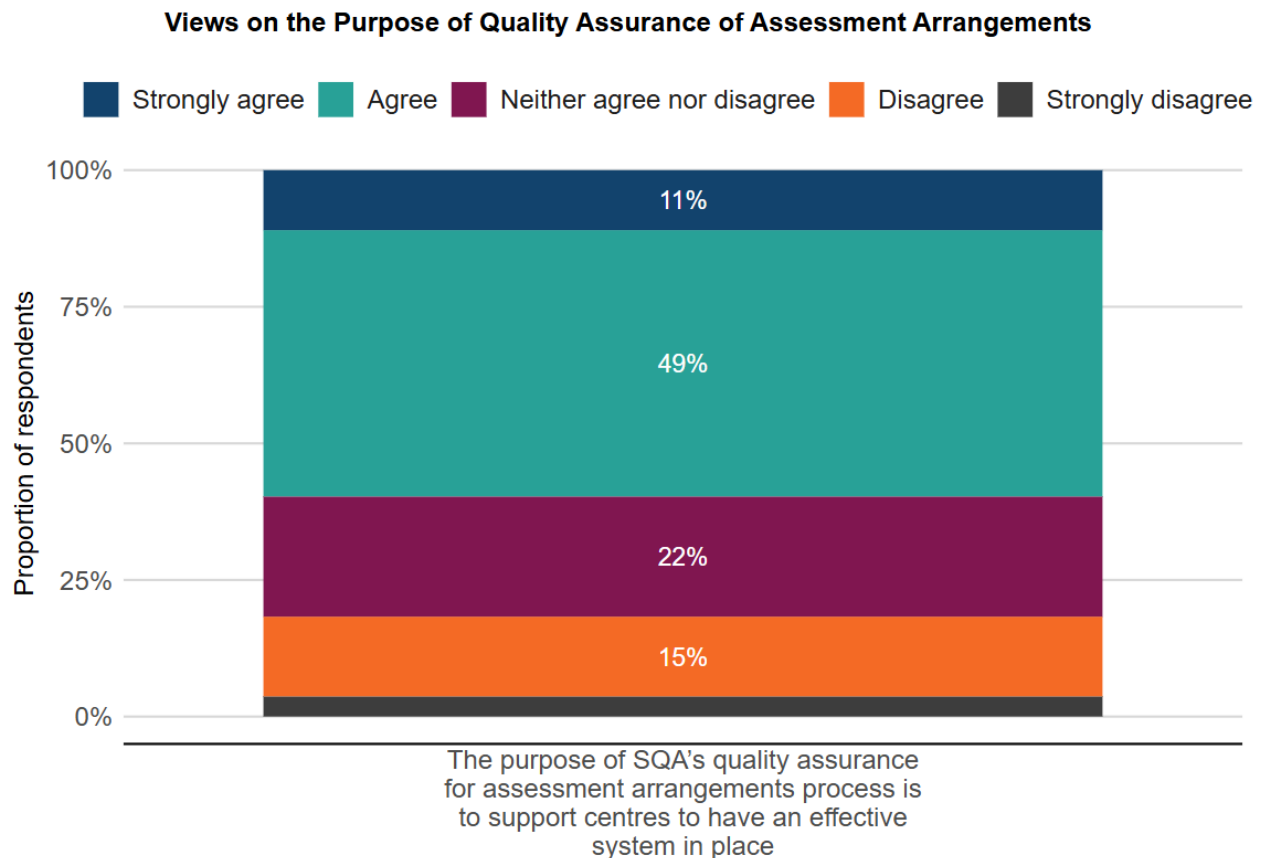


### Purpose of QA of AA

Views on the purpose of having a QA of AA process were mixed. 3 in 5 (60%) participants agreed that the purpose of the QA of AA process is to support schools to have an effective system in place (Figure 8).

1 in 5 (22%) participants neither agreed nor disagreed that this was the purpose, and 18% of participants disagreed this was the purpose. However, it is unclear from the data what these participants might consider the purpose the QA of AA process to be.

Figure 8: Proportion of participants who responded to views on the purpose of QA of AA



In addition, the majority of participants said that the QA of AA visits allowed all parts of their school's process to be shared with SQA staff (Table 14). Four participants left comments on which processes they felt were not covered during the QA of AA visit:

- ◆ How staff are informed of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the QA of AA
- ◆ Authorising assessment arrangements
- ◆ Determining the most appropriate assessment arrangement for a learner
- ◆ Identifying any difficulty a disabled learner and those with additional support needs might have in demonstrating their attainment

Table 14: Proportion of participants who said that the quality assurance visit allowed all parts of their school's QA of AA process to be shared

Does the quality assurance (or 'audit') visit allow you to share all parts of your centre's quality assurance of assessment arrangements process?	Count	%
Yes	66	83.5%
No	13	16.5%

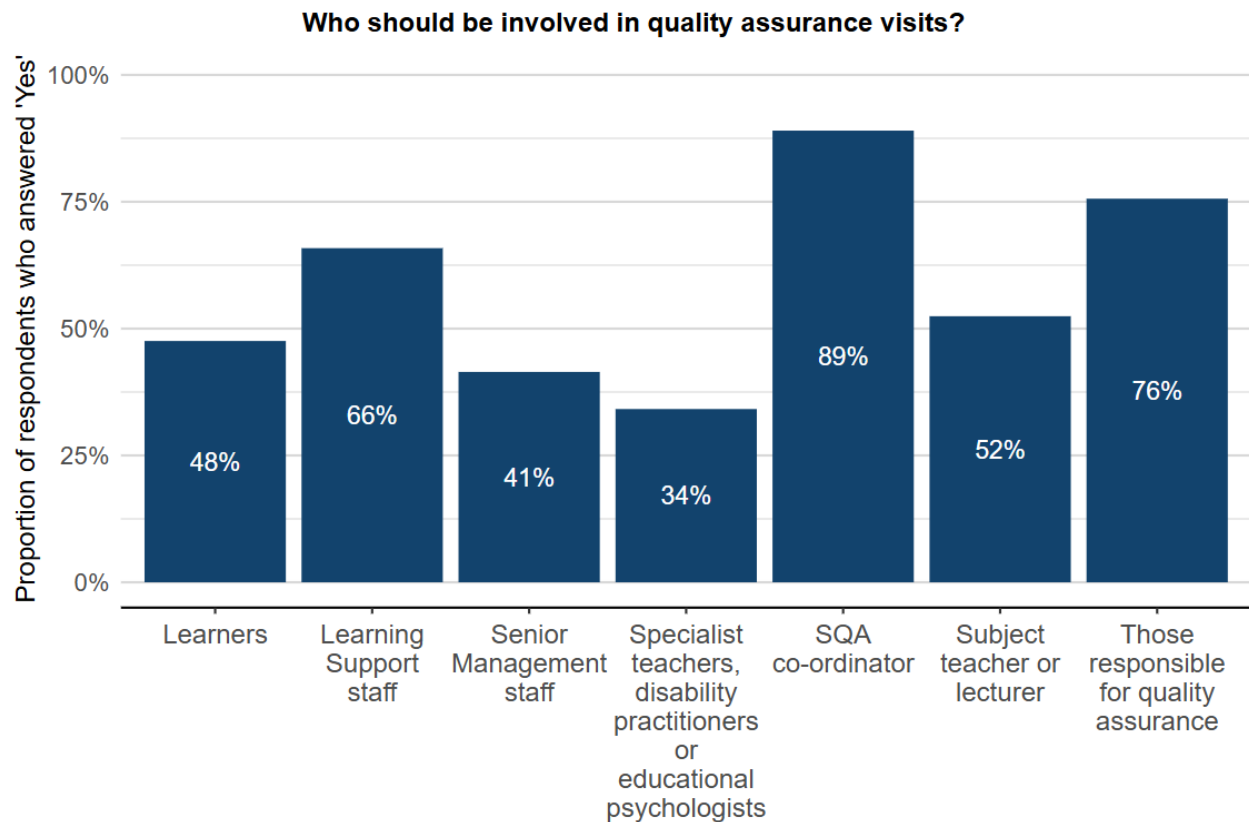
## New QA of AA model

Participants overwhelmingly said that SQA co-ordinators should be part of the QA of AA visit, followed by anyone responsible for quality assurance, and learning support staff (Figure 9). Around half of participants thought that subject teachers or lecturers and learners should be part of the visit.

The stakeholders that fewest participants thought should be part of the visit were senior management staff (41%); and only 1 in 3 (34%) participants thought specialist teachers (such as Qualified Teachers of children and young people with a Visual Impairment or Qualified Teachers of Deaf children and young people), disability practitioners, or educational psychologists should be involved in visits.

The majority (96%) of participants did not think there were other staff that should be involved. Of the suggestions made, the most common were principal teachers, learning support staff, and pupil support assistants.

*Figure 9: Proportion of participants who responded 'Yes' that the listed stakeholders should be involved in the quality assurance of assessment arrangements visits*



Participants were less sure about what quality assurance visits should include (Table 15). When asked if they would prefer a QA of AA model where the visits were based more on school policies or procedures, the largest proportion of responses were from those who neither agreed nor disagreed (39%). More participants strongly agreed (32%) than agreed (23%) that visits should be focused on school policies and procedures.

When asked to provide further comment on this question, participants were generally supportive of the proposed change. Many drew attention to the time burden for gathering all required



evidence and to issues of manageability for staff members, in the context of the increasing number of assessment arrangements requests alongside budgetary constraints. With that in mind, a number of participants indicated that a move towards focusing on policies and procedures during SQA's QA of AA visits would be a more realistic and consistent approach that would reduce practitioners' workload. Others also suggested that there was no need to examine evidence as the professional judgement of practitioners should be trusted.

Only 6% of participants disagreed with the proposed change. Disagreement to the change may be because of the proposed exchange for policies and procedures 'rather than' presenting evidence relating to each learner against the seven requirements on SQA's criteria. Some participants expressed the view that the QA of AA visit should focus on policies and procedures in addition to the seven evidence requirements. It was suggested that while policies and procedures are significant in terms of setting out rationale and intentions, evidence also has to be examined as this demonstrates how the policies are being implemented in relation to individual learners.

*Table 15: Proportion of participants who said that they would prefer a model for quality assurance visits that focused on schools' policies and procedures*

<b>I would prefer a model where the quality assurance visit focused on our school's policies and procedures rather than current seven evidence requirements.</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Neither agree nor disagree	32	39.0%
Strongly agree	26	31.7%
Agree	19	23.2%
Disagree	4	4.9%
Strongly disagree	1	1.2%

Participants mostly agreed (72%) that having advanced notice of the evidence SQA would like to see would be helpful (Table 16). This may be due to the time burden associated with gathering a large volume of evidence, which was discussed by participants in the focus groups.

*Table 16: Proportion of participants who said that they would prefer a model for quality assurance visits with advanced notice of the evidence that would be reviewed by SQA staff*

<b>Schools are informed which learner's evidence SQA would like to see up to two days before the quality assurance of assessment arrangements visit. To what extent do you agree or disagree that giving you advanced notice of the evidence SQA would like to see is helpful?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agree	31	38.3%
Agree	27	33.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	14	17.3%
Disagree	6	7.4%
Strongly disagree	3	3.7%

In terms of the timing of SQA's visits, most participants said that the current period of time (between September and December) for quality assurance visits is ideal (68%) (Table 17). This is interesting considering that responses to other questions about visits indicated that time was an issue (Figure 6). This may suggest that although participants feel that QA of AA visits have a time cost, there is not necessarily a better time of year to do them.

However, close to 1 in 3 (32%) participants also preferred another time of year which may suggest a need for flexibility in terms of timings.

*Table 17: Proportion of participants who gave a preference for visiting times*

<b>Quality assurance visits usually take place between September and December. Please indicate when you think the visits should take place:</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
September - December	53	67.9%
January - March	14	17.9%
March - May	11	14.1%

### **Proposed new QA of AA criteria**

Respondents of the survey were given information on how existing QA of AA criteria were worded, with proposed new wording (Table 18) also shown next to each other. Respondents were asked to provide feedback on whether wording in the proposed new criteria helped to clarify SQA's quality assurance requirements, and whether this would be helpful in reducing workload associated with their internal QA of AA process.

*Table 18: New criteria*

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Wording</b>
1	Provide evidence of and explain your process for internal verification of assessment arrangements decisions
2	Tell us what evidence you have that demonstrates a learner's additional support needs
3	Explain and provide evidence of how your centre determine the most appropriate assessment arrangement for each learner, including how it was considered across different subjects
4	Provide evidence that the learner has agreed to the provision of assessment arrangements
5	You must provide a documented process for the management of assessment arrangements for SQA qualifications which includes these steps: identification of need, how you determined the most appropriate assessment arrangement, how you verified your decisions, how you communicated and agreed arrangements with the learner and/or parent carer

Across all proposed new criteria, over 65% of participants agreed they were easy to understand (Table 19). Criterion 2 was the easiest to understand (83%), while Criterion 5 was the least easy (65%). Participants were the most uncertain about Criterion 1.

*Table 19: Proportion of participants who thought the new criteria were easy to understand*

	<b>Criterion 1</b>	<b>Criterion 2</b>	<b>Criterion 3</b>	<b>Criterion 4</b>	<b>Criterion 5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	27.2%	37.0%	40.0%	42.0%	32.1%
<b>Agree</b>	39.5%	45.7%	38.8%	39.5%	33.3%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	27.2%	12.3%	15.0%	14.8%	23.5%
<b>Disagree</b>	2.5%	3.7%	5.0%	2.5%	8.6%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	3.7%	1.2%	1.3%	1.2%	2.5%

In terms of reduction to workloads, participants said that most of the proposed new criteria reduce workloads associated with QA of AA (Table 20). Around 3 out of 4 participants agreed that Criterion 2 (75%), Criterion 3 (78%), and Criterion 4 (75%) would reduce workload. 65% agreed that Criterion 1 would reduce workload.

Only half of participants (52%) agreed that Criterion 5 would reduce workload, while 1 in 4 neither agreed nor disagreed (25%), and 1 in 5 (23%) disagreed.

*Table 20: Proportion of participants who thought the new criteria reduced workloads*

	<b>Criterion 1</b>	<b>Criterion 2</b>	<b>Criterion 3</b>	<b>Criterion 4</b>	<b>Criterion 5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	33.3%	35.8%	45.0%	39.5%	27.2%
<b>Agree</b>	32.1%	39.5%	32.5%	35.8%	24.7%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	21.0%	18.5%	13.8%	11.1%	24.7%
<b>Disagree</b>	4.9%	3.7%	5.0%	4.9%	14.8%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	8.6%	2.5%	3.8%	8.6%	8.6%

Views on the effectiveness of the new criteria in identifying and verifying a learner's eligibility for assessment arrangements was mixed in terms of levels of agreeability (Table 21). 4 in 5 (over 80%) of participants agreed that Criterion 2 and Criterion 4 were effective. 3 in 4 (78%) participants agreed that Criterion 3 was effective, and 2 in 3 (68%) participants agreed that that Criterion 1 was effective.

*Table 21: Proportion of participants who thought the new criteria are relevant to supporting effective centre quality assurance systems*

	<b>Criterion 1</b>	<b>Criterion 2</b>	<b>Criterion 3</b>	<b>Criterion 4</b>	<b>Criterion 5</b>
<b>Strongly agree</b>	23.5%	33.3%	41.3%	40.7%	27.2%
<b>Agree</b>	44.4%	49.4%	36.3%	39.5%	35.8%
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	24.7%	16.0%	15.0%	14.8%	30.9%
<b>Disagree</b>	6.2%	0.0%	3.8%	2.5%	3.7%
<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1.2%	1.2%	3.8%	2.5%	2.5%

Overall, across all criteria, on average Criterion 5 was the one that participants least agreed with. Criterion 5 received an average of 60% agreeability across all measures, compared to Criterion 2, 3, and 4, all of which had 78% – 80% agreeability on average. This may be because Criterion 5 was the longest of the criteria presented.

# Colleges and ETPs

## Guidance

Most (73%) of the respondents had read [Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres](#) (Table 22).

Table 22: Proportion of participants who have read SQA Guidance on QA of AA

Have you read Quality Assurance of Assessment Arrangements in Internal and External Assessments: Information for centres (updated August 2024)?	Count	%
Yes	19	73.1
No	7	26.9

Of those who read the guidance, feedback was positive: 89% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the guidance was easy to understand; 85% of participants agreed that the guidance was helpful; 79% of participants agreed that their centre's roles and responsibilities were clear; and 89% of participants agreed that SQA's roles and responsibilities were clear (Figure 10).

Fewer respondents had read the [Assessment Arrangements FAQs](#) (Table 23).

Figure 10: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the QA of AA guidance  
Views on Guidance

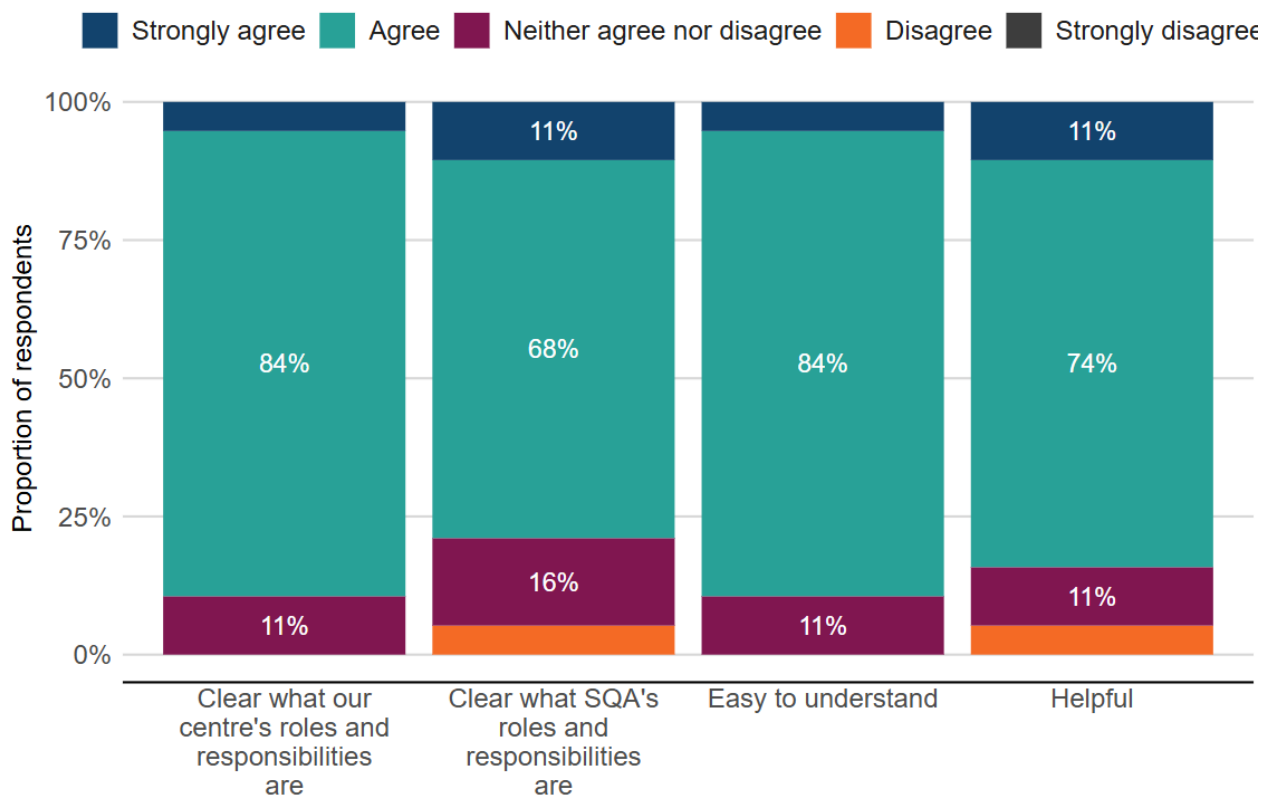
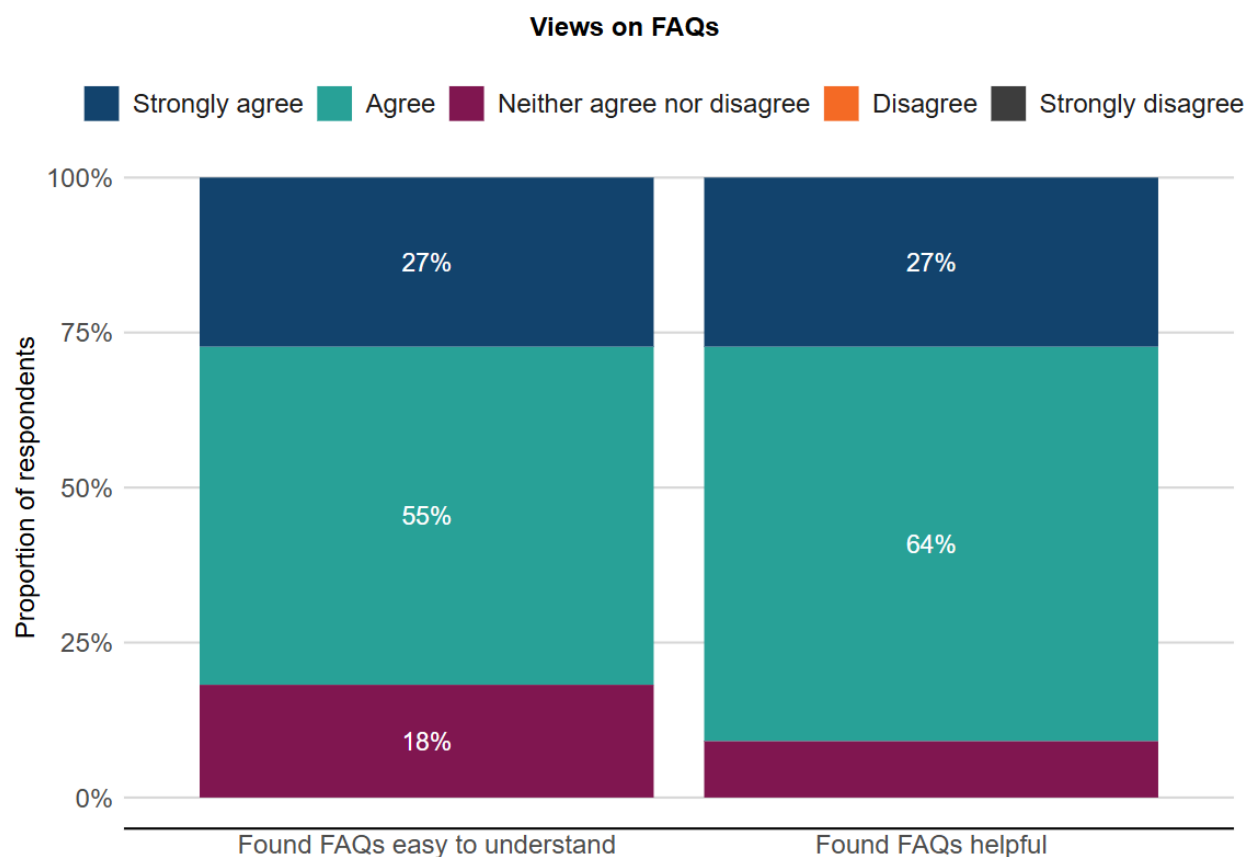


Table 23: Proportion of participants who have read SQA's Assessment Arrangement FAQs

Have you read Assessment Arrangements FAQ?	Count	%
Yes	11	42.3
No	15	57.7

Most of those who read the FAQs agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to understand (82%) and helpful (81%) (Figure 11). No participants disagreed.

Figure 11: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the Assessment Arrangements FAQs



Only 44% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt up to date with changes made to the QA of AA process (Figure 12); even fewer (31%) felt that changes were communicated with to them frequently enough (Figure 13). This is supported by the number of open-text responses that suggested changes to communications or dissemination of information would be helpful. It also mirrors findings from our assessment arrangements evaluation where there were calls for consistency and having information in the same place on the SQA website, as well as making notifications of changes more prominent.

Figure 12: Proportion of participant responses to statements about QA of AA updates

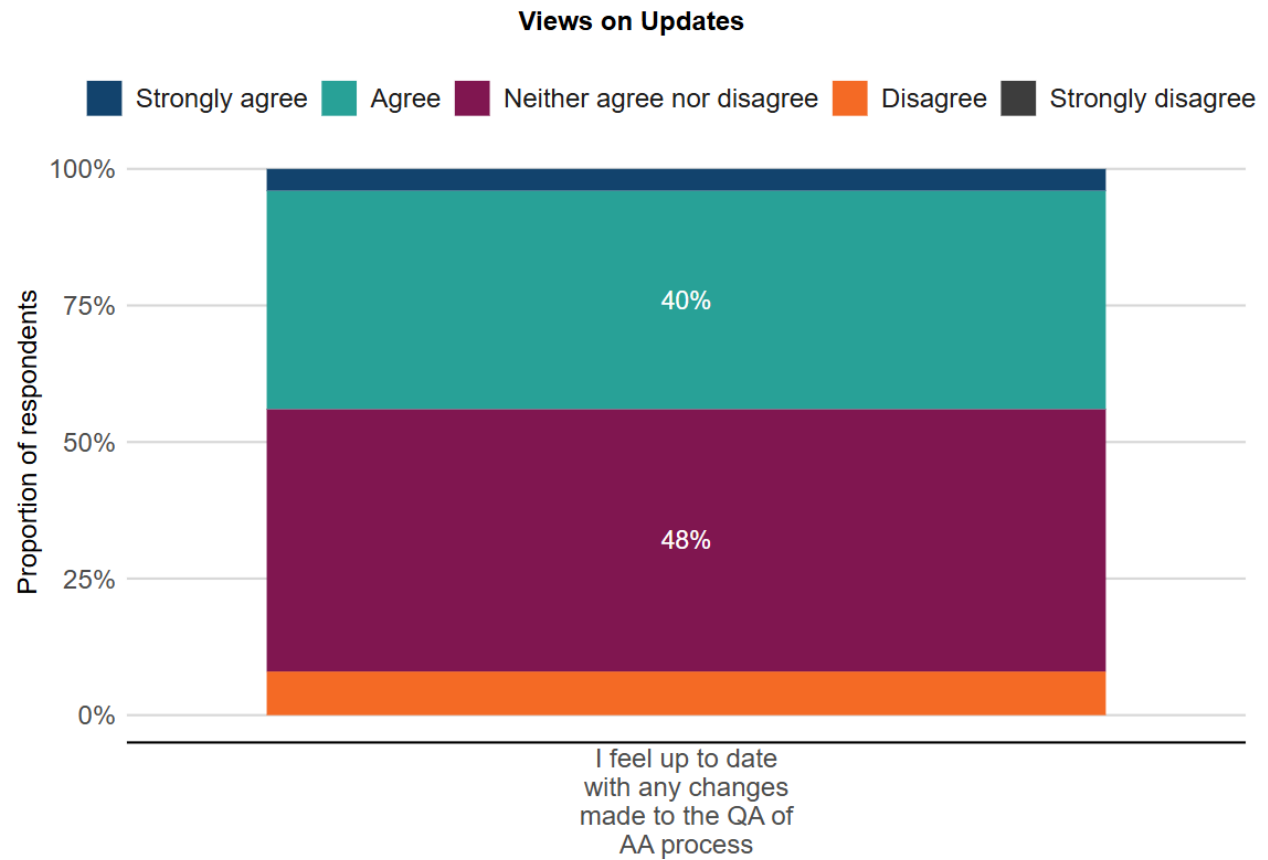
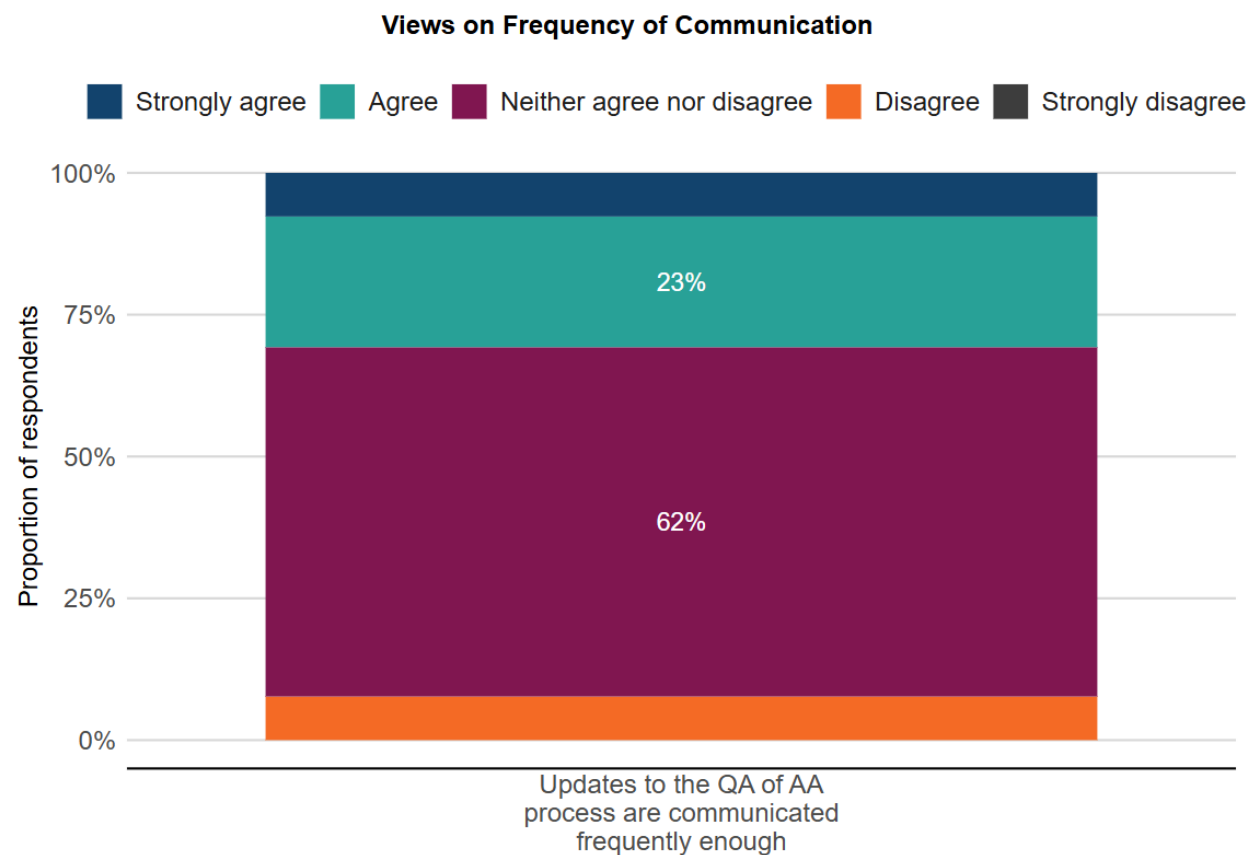


Figure 13: Proportion of participant responses to statements about updates made to the QA of AA guidance



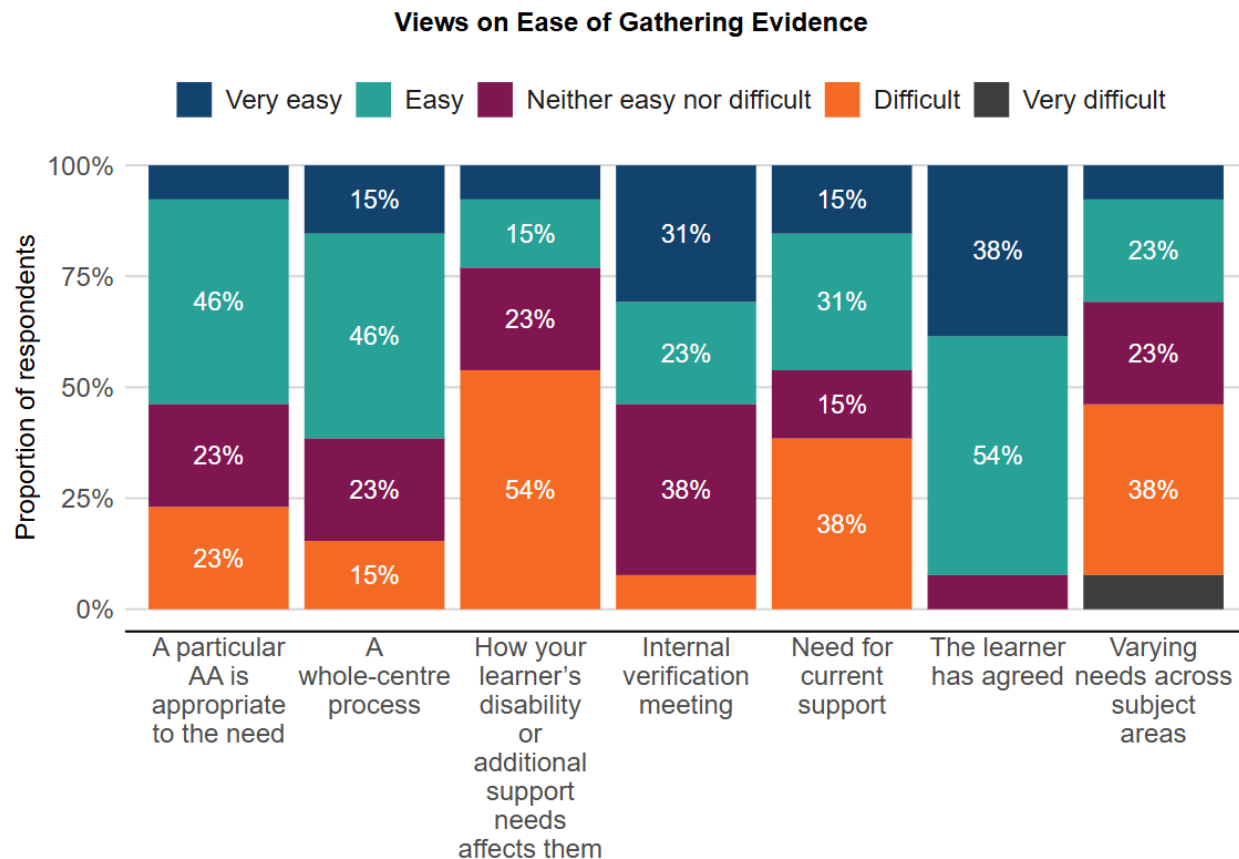
Participants offered a range of suggestions for how SQA can improve our communications to ensure that centres are kept informed of changes in open-text questions:

- ◆ Ensuring that college updates are communicated separately to school updates
- ◆ Ensuring that a broader range of staff members are provided with updates rather than just SQA co-ordinators, such as Quality Team staff
- ◆ Publishing updated documentation earlier in the year
- ◆ Improving the website to make it easier to navigate and find information

## Gathering evidence

Participants were mixed on the ease of some evidence-gathering processes. Of the processes participants were asked about, the easiest was getting evidence for learners agreeing to the provision of assessment arrangements (Figure 14). Almost all (92%) of participants said this process was easy or very easy.

*Figure 14: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the ease of gathering evidence*

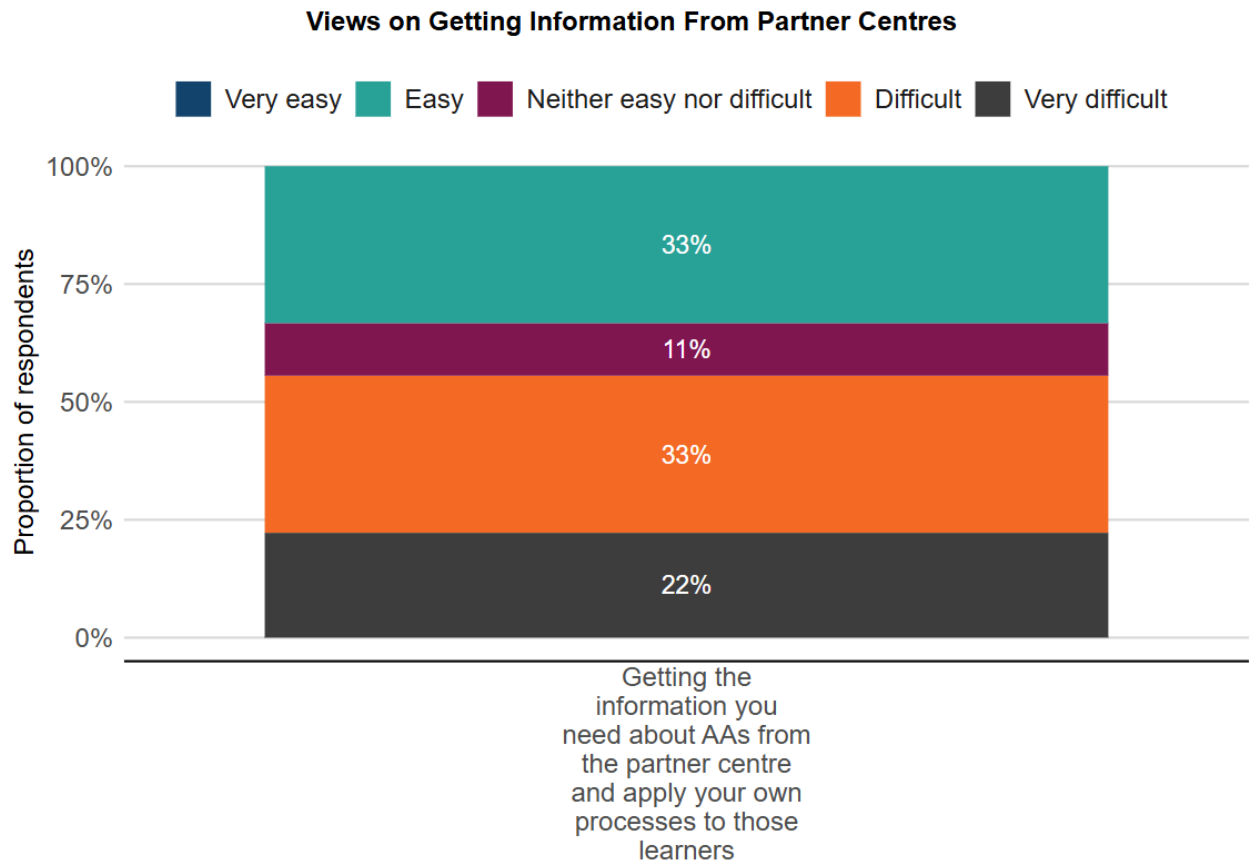


The most difficult process was gathering evidence of how a learner's disability or additional support needs affects them. Overall, 1 in 2 participants (54%) said this was difficult. In our focus groups, many participants expressed the view that colleges do not have enough time to gather the necessary evidence to put assessment arrangements in place or to meet SQA's standards of quality assurance. One of the key differences was that colleges often do not see the students for a full week.



When asked about the ease of getting information from their partners (such as schools or other agencies, such as medical professionals or social work), none of the respondents said this was very easy and 55% said it was difficult or very difficult (Figure 15). In our focus groups, one college participant reported feeling ‘at the mercy of external agencies’ for assessment arrangement evidence.

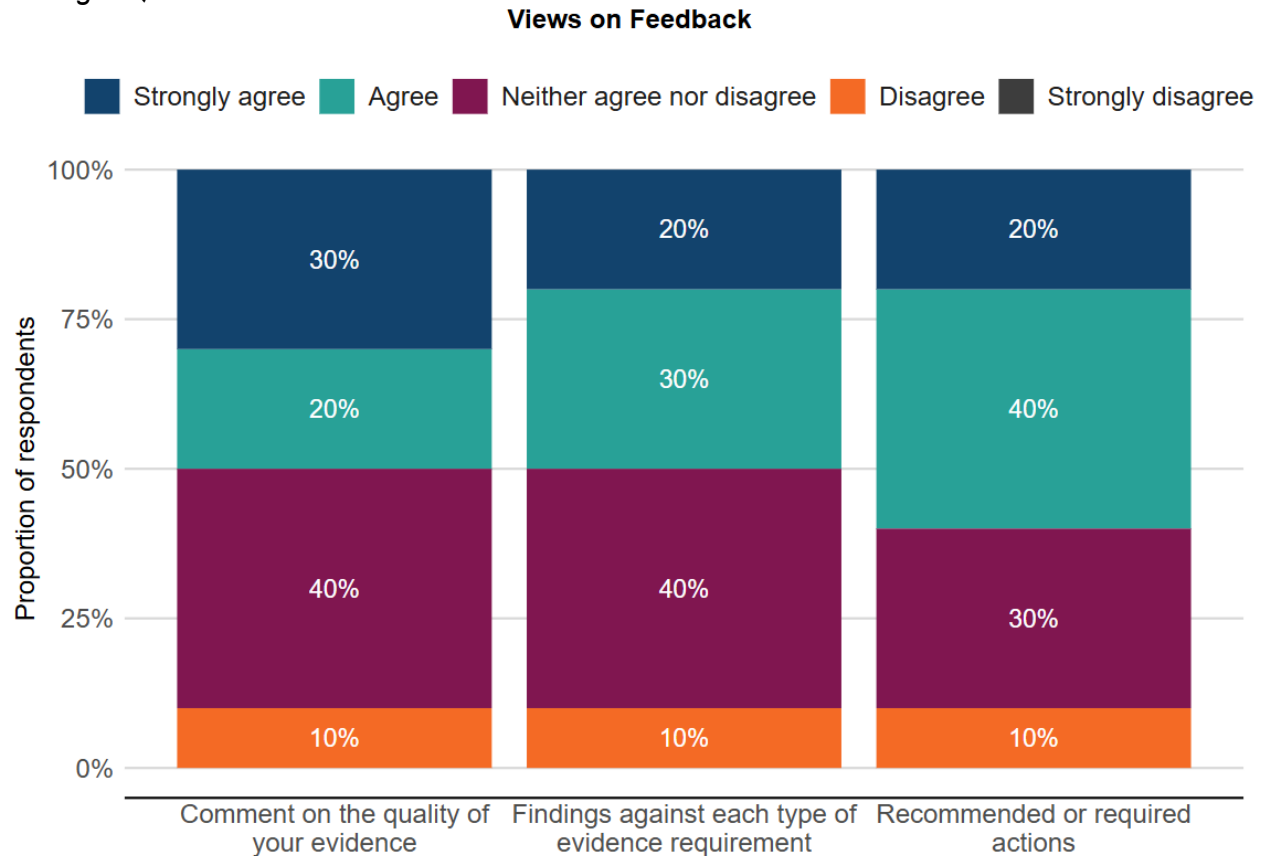
*Figure 15: Proportion of participant who work with partner centres responses to getting information from their partners*



## Feedback

In general, participants were mixed about the feedback they had received during one of SQA's QA of AA visits. Around half of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the comments on the quality of the evidence and the findings against each type of evidence requirement were helpful. More participants (60%) agreed that the recommended or required actions were helpful. None of the participants disagreed with any of the feedback being helpful, but there was a large proportion who felt they could neither agree nor disagree (Figure 16).

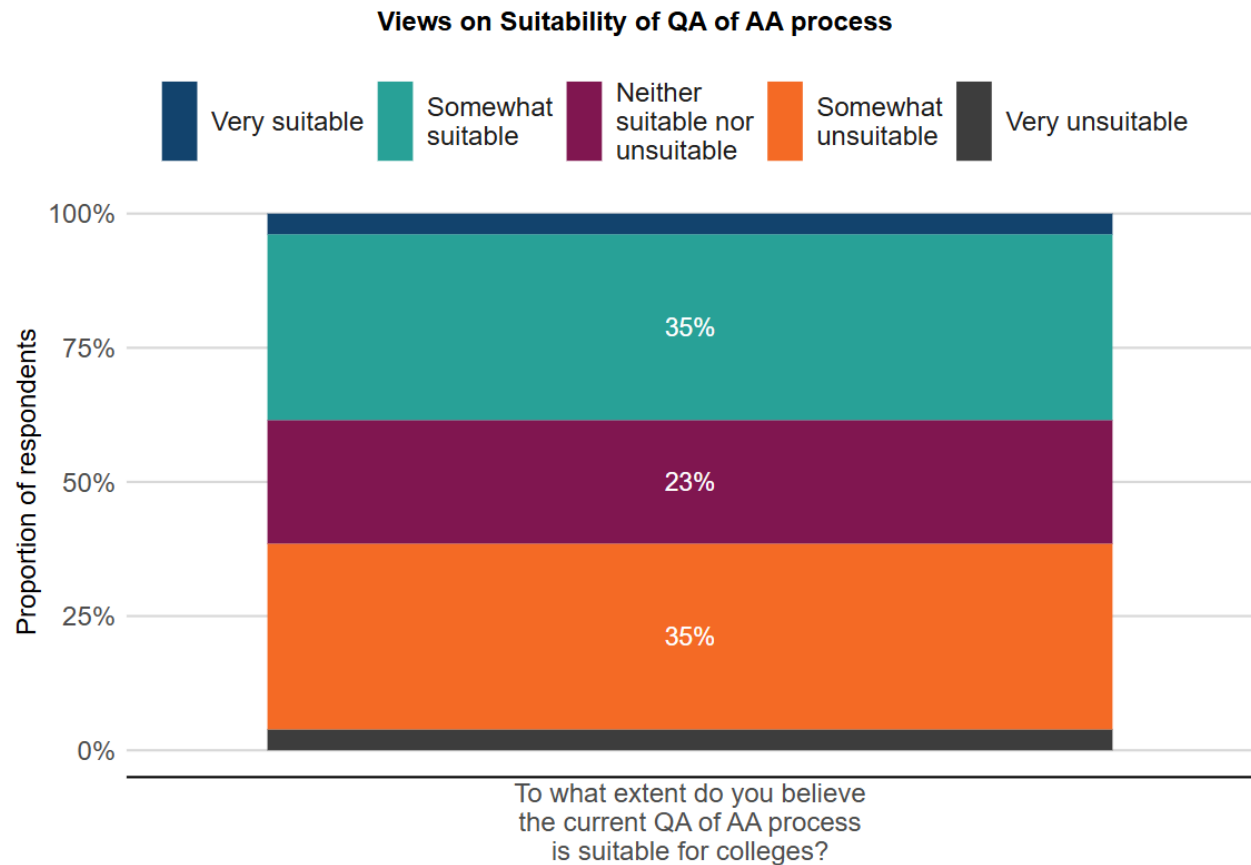
Figure 16: Proportion of participant responses to statements about the feedback they received during a QA of AA visit



### Purpose of QA of AA

Views on the purpose of the QA of AA process were mixed. Very few participants felt strongly that the QA of AA process was very suitable or very unsuitable. Similar proportions (1 in 3) said it was somewhat suitable and somewhat unsuitable (Figure 17). This supports our previous findings that colleges recognise the strengths of the QA of AA process in terms of ensuring that appropriate assessment arrangements are provided to those learners who need them. However, their infrastructure — including their learning, teaching and assessment environment — differs from schools' and therefore their QA of AA needs are different.

Figure 17: Proportion of participant responses to suitability of the current QA of AA model



### New model

Participants were divided on the suggestion to remove the need for colleges to be subject to QA of AA visits and for their assessment arrangements policies and procedures only to be scrutinised as part of existing systems verification processes. Just over half (62%) agreed or strongly agreed with the suggestion, but in 1 in 4 neither agreed nor disagreed and 1 in 10 respondents strongly disagreed (Table 24).

When asked to provide further comment on this question, participants welcomed fewer visits, but stressed that if the evidence-gathering requirements remain the same, there would not be a big impact on the associated workload. According to our focus group research, some colleges and ETPs feel that they benefit from the visit.

*Table 24: Proportion of participant responses to the new proposed model*

<b>To what extent to do agree or disagree with the idea of removing the need for colleges to be subject to QA of AA visits?</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Strongly agree	5	21.7
Agree	9	39.1
Neither agree nor disagree	6	26.1
Disagree	0	0.0
Strongly disagree	3	13.0

# Conclusion

Through consultation with centres in this research, we seek to investigate a set of QA of AA models that would meet the needs of schools, colleges and training providers, while ensuring we continue to meet our Public Sector Equality Duty.

Colleges and training providers, like SQA, also have a duty to meet the requirements under the Equality Act 2010. Schools have their own duty to meet the requirements not only under the Equality Act 2010, but local authority schools also a duty under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 (as amended Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2009).

Centres have the delegated responsibility (from SQA as Scotland's national awarding body) to ensure an appropriate quality assurance process is in place to support the provision of assessment arrangements to disabled learners and those with additional support needs.

We have summarised below the suggested opportunities for improvement in SQA (and Qualifications Scotland's) approach to quality assurance of assessment arrangements based on the feedback received from schools, colleges and training providers who participated in this research project.

## Schools

In general, the results of the school survey indicate a degree of positivity to both the current QA of AA process and requirements, as well as proposed new changes.

Positive aspects (over 70% agreement) of the QA of AA process were:

- ◆ Guidance and assessment arrangement FAQs are easy to understand, helpful, and that roles and responsibilities of schools and SQA are clear.
- ◆ Ease of getting permissions from learners.
- ◆ Feeling up to date on changes to the guidance.
- ◆ Helpfulness of feedback.
- ◆ QA of AA visits allowed all of a school's assessment arrangement processes to be shared.

Feedback received from school practitioners indicates that there is an opportunity for SQA's colleagues involved in assessment arrangements and communication to work collaboratively to improve communication about assessment arrangements to centres, learners, parents and carers to ensure the roles and responsibilities of each is clear, and that it is being consistently implemented across all centres delivering National Courses.

There were also a number of comments made by schools about challenges with delivering assessment arrangements. This could be for a number of reasons. Previous research suggested that schools did not have sufficient resources to accommodate the increase in assessment arrangements and that they did not feel confident they would be able to continue meeting the needs of these learners with the resources presently available to them ([SQA, 2024a](#)). It may be the case that these issues are a talking point for schools, and practitioners wanted to discuss this with one another during our focus group sessions.

It may also be the case that while this research aimed to make a distinction between assessment arrangements and the QA of AA process, from the perspective of schools these two issues fall under one wider 'delivery of assessment arrangements' umbrella. It is not possible for schools to separate the QA of AA process from their delivery of assessment arrangements — identification of a need results in the requirement for schools to provide the assessment arrangements for learners.

### **Proposed new QA of AA model and criteria**

Positive aspects about the proposed new model and criteria were:

- ◆ SQA co-ordinators and those responsible for quality assurance have a role during SQA's QA of AA visits.
- ◆ It is of high importance that proposed processes take a whole-school approach and that this is not delegated only to specific individuals in the school, such as the learning support staff.
- ◆ Practitioners should be given advanced notice of evidence requirements.
- ◆ Criteria 2, 3, and 4 had more positive feedback in relation to ease of understanding, reducing workloads, and relevance.

Although in general the survey did not produce any overwhelmingly negative results, areas where practitioners indicated less positivity or agreement (under 50%) compared to other measures were:

- ◆ The ease of evidence-gathering processes, particularly as related to time needed to do this and for varying needs across subjects.
- ◆ Visits, particularly that SQA visits are timely and that they are manageable within the time available.
- ◆ Communications around changes to SQA guidance and requirements.
- ◆ Senior management and specialist teachers, disability practitioners, or educational psychologists involvement in visits.

A new QA of AA model for schools should consider:

- ◆ Current issues in the delivery of assessment arrangements.
- ◆ How feasible it is for schools to complete their QA roles and responsibilities while managing the needs of a rising number of learners with additional support needs.
- ◆ How manageable the process is for smaller schools, where there is high staff turnover, rural schools or SIMD 1 areas.
- ◆ Continuing to create a supportive relationship as QA of AA is often viewed as a daunting experience.
- ◆ The type of support that can be provided to schools that have not met the quality assurance criteria.
- ◆ Whether Criterion 5 will reduce practitioner workload.
- ◆ Being flexible to changes in school practices and a learner's need for assessment arrangements.
- ◆ Regularly communicating updates and recommendations about the QA of AA process through different channels to avoid misinformation. This includes agreeing the most appropriate (and potentially varied) methods of disseminating this information to ensure that a consistent approach is being taken by all schools.
- ◆ Including examples in evidence requirements.

- ◆ The sources of anxiety for staff taking part in QA of AA.

## Colleges

In general, colleges and training providers indicated a mixed response to both the QA of AA process and the proposed changes.

Positive aspects (over 70% agreement) of the QA of AA process were about the guidance and FAQs. College and training provider participants found these easy to understand, helpful, and that roles and responsibilities centres and SQA are clearly explained.

Although in general the survey did not produce any overwhelmingly negative results, areas where practitioners indicated less positivity or agreement (under 50%) compared to other measures were:

- ◆ Feeling up to date on changes to the guidance and communications around guidance changes.
- ◆ The ease of evidence-gathering for processes, particularly those related to learners' disabilities and additional support needs, were found to be challenging.
- ◆ The ease of getting information from partner centres.
- ◆ Whether feedback from the quality assurance of assessment arrangements is helpful.

As in the feedback received from schools, college practitioners also indicated that there is an opportunity for colleagues involved in assessment arrangements and communications to work collaboratively to identify opportunities to improve how information about assessment arrangements is communicated to ensure that the latest guidance is being implemented consistently across all colleges. For example, some college staff believed that use of ICT could only be requested as an assessment arrangement for disabled learners and those with additional support needs. It is important to note, however, that there is the option for centres to request use of ICT without spellcheck for learners who do not have additional support needs and prefer to type their responses, or for those with illegible handwriting. This feedback presents an opportunity for us to review how this is clearly communicated with colleges and training providers.

There were also a number of comments made by colleges about challenges with delivering assessment arrangements. This could be for numerous reasons. Previous research has suggested that the increasing number of assessment arrangement requests meant that colleges, similar to schools, are struggling to meet their needs with the existing resources available to them.

It may also be the case that while this research aimed to make a distinction between assessment arrangements and the QA of AA process, colleges perceive these two issues as falling into the same 'delivery of assessment arrangements' category. It may not be possible for colleges to separate the QA of AA process from their delivery of assessment arrangements — the identification of a need results in the requirement for colleges to provide the assessment arrangements for learners, along with evidence to support this provision.

A new QA model for colleges should consider:

- ◆ The practicability of evidence-gathering in the college context, particularly given the increased demand for assessment arrangements.
- ◆ Challenges in ensuring faculty and teaching staff engage with the QA of AA process, which can make it difficult to gather the required evidence.
- ◆ The possibility of having a different process for colleges, given the time constraints and less contact time with learners.
- ◆ The possibility of absorbing the requirements from the current QA of AA process into the systems verification process for colleges, provided that resourcing issues are considered carefully to ensure it is realistic and sustainable for colleges.
- ◆ Ensuring that SQA guidance is clear in terms of requirements, and that all guidance is provided in a single space in an intuitive format.
- ◆ Regularly communicating updates and recommendations about any changes to the QA of AA process through different channels to avoid miscommunication. This includes agreeing the most appropriate methods of disseminating information to ensure there is a consistent approach being taken by all colleges, employers and training providers.
- ◆ The need for new evidence requirements for each academic session in college Including examples in of 'good' evidence.



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