



SQA Equality Outcomes 2021–25

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Introduction

SQA is required by the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to prepare and publish a set of equality outcomes at four-year intervals.

In reviewing SQA's equality outcomes we used the expertise available within SQA's existing equality governance structure that oversees our compliance with the equality duties.

During 2020–21, work was carried out, co-ordinated by SQA's equality sub-groups, to:

- ◆ Identify progress against our existing equality action plans, work that is complete, or that is ongoing.
- ◆ Review internal and external evidence sources.
- ◆ Review published statistical evidence and research.
- ◆ Consider evidence of significant inequalities that exist within our society.
- ◆ Consider feedback from a number of groups about their experiences through SQA's consultation and involvement activity.
- ◆ Consider feedback from SQA employees, Trade Union colleagues and Employee Networks, and responses gathered as part of our internal staff surveys.
- ◆ Identify issues for SQA in relation to equality, to inform SQA's equality outcomes, actions and measures.

Our equality outcomes relate to three functions SQA as an employer SQA (awarding body) and SQA Accreditation. Actions have been identified to outline the work we will undertake to achieve these outcomes and advance equality.

The past year has been one of extraordinary challenges and we will continue to develop our understanding of the significant impact of COVID-19 on equality to be able to ensure this informs our approach to recovery and renewal from the pandemic. We will keep under review the commitments we have made in 2021 to ensure that, where we can, we tackle the most pressing inequalities in our society, including those exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following publication of our equality outcomes, we will develop more detailed action plans setting out timescales and milestones to achieve our commitments.

We will also continue to gather feedback, both internally and externally, on a regular basis from a number of different groups. We aim to seek these views as our outcomes and actions are developed into more detailed work plans. And will continue to measure our progress over the next two years to achieve these commitments.

SQA Equality Outcomes

Equality Outcome 1: Have an increasingly diverse workforce that fully embraces equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do.

Equality Outcome 2: Advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination for all candidates by ensuring SQA's qualifications are as fair and accessible as possible.

Equality Outcome 3: Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation.

Equality Outcome 1: Have an increasingly diverse workforce that fully embraces equality, diversity and inclusion in all that we do

We have identified six steps we need to take to achieve this outcome:

- 1:** Foster an inclusive culture and environment where all colleagues feel valued, respected and supported.
- 2:** Promote and support effective voice to ensure our employee views are listened to and considered to inform SQA's equality, diversity and inclusion commitments and action plans.
- 3:** Embed the principles of an inclusive culture as part our employee education and training on equality to advance diversity and inclusion practices.
- 4:** Develop and implement a race equality action plan with published milestones to support and increase the diversity of our workforce and meet SQA's commitments to the Business in the Community (BITC) Race at Work Charter.
- 5:** Improve the collection and analysis of equality data including pay data to aid the development of action plans and identify trends to support the progression of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- 6:** Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion principles are embedded in our governance, strategy and planning.

1 Foster an inclusive culture and environment where all colleagues feel valued, respected and supported

This step will include:

- ◆ publishing a leadership statement which clearly sets out the behaviours expected of leaders across the organisation
- ◆ ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion objectives and plans are aligned with the development of our people strategy
- ◆ reviewing all HR policies to ensure they incorporate best practice
- ◆ continuing to ensure we meet our commitments to being a disability confident employer, actively working towards Disability Confident Leader status at Level 3 by 2025
- ◆ agreeing our commitments as a Stonewall Diversity Champion
- ◆ analysing intelligence from exit interviews, complex case work and disputes involving dignity at work, to monitor equality in practice
- ◆ becoming a Carer Positive Employer, with the aim of achieving 'engaged' level

2 Ensure our employee views are listened to and considered to inform SQA's equality, diversity and inclusion commitments and action plans. We're calling this 'Effective Voice'

This step includes:

- ◆ continuing to foster a constructive relationship with trade unions, working jointly on all matters related to equality, diversity and inclusion
- ◆ engaging with employee network groups to promote understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion across the organisation
- ◆ ensuring colleagues understand how trade unions and employee network groups contribute to the programme of work on equality, diversity and inclusion
- ◆ carrying out the annual People Survey to better understand colleagues' views of our culture, develop action plans from the results, ensure actions are followed through and progress publicised
- ◆ continuing to improve communication and feedback channels to ensure colleagues' views are heard and acted upon

3 Embed the principles of inclusive culture as part our employee education and training on equality to advance diversity and inclusion practices

This means:

- ◆ designing and delivering accessible training for all colleagues
- ◆ providing diversity and inclusion education in development programmes for all staff
- ◆ ensuring that participation in equality and diversity training for all colleagues is mandatory

- ◆ aligning talent management and succession planning strategies with the principles of diversity and inclusion

4 Develop and implement a race equality action plan, with published milestones to support and increase the diversity of our workforce and meet SQA's commitments to the Business in the Community (BITC) Race at Work Charter

This includes:

- ◆ collaborating with our ACE (Appreciate Culture and Ethnicity) Network to enhance knowledge, understanding and confidence to talk about race in the workplace
- ◆ carrying out a review of the recruitment process to remove any potential barriers and actively promote SQA as an inclusive workplace
- ◆ benchmarking with other organisations to identify areas for improvement and best practice
- ◆ reviewing the language used in adverts with recommendations on how it can be enhanced to promote diversity of applicants
- ◆ progressing anonymised applications, with the aim of removing personal details from applications on the recruitment system by the end of 2022
- ◆ analysing data from e-recruiter to identify any potential ethnicity bias in the application, shortlist and interview processes
- ◆ identifying community links and groups to expand our network of relationships with race organisations to increase the diversity of our recruitment pool
- ◆ work with stakeholder organisations to promote apprenticeship programmes to Minority Ethnic groups

5 Improve the collection and analysis of equality data, including pay data, to aid the development of action plans and identify trends to support the progression of equality, diversity and inclusion

This step will include:

- ◆ reviewing and updating our equality data definitions and values when collecting data from job applicants and employees
- ◆ raising awareness of SQA's responsibilities and the importance of data gathering, monitoring and reporting employee information
- ◆ improving the reporting and analysis of employment monitoring data gathered across all protected characteristics
- ◆ continuing to conduct and publish annual equal pay audits and report on the pay gaps

6 Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion principles are embedded in our governance, strategy and planning

This includes:

- ◆ reviewing the use of equality impact assessments to identify issues and opportunities for development and improvement and embed equality impact considerations across decision-making processes
- ◆ ensuring that scrutiny panels give due regard to equality as part of their decision making
- ◆ updating governance arrangements to strengthen processes: oversight, ownership and signoff of completed equality impacts assessments
- ◆ reviewing and promote online training to support rigorous completion of equality impact assessments across SQA
- ◆ improving our evidence base and supporting employees to identify, collect and analyse data
- ◆ ensuring that equality impact assessment engagement and consultation is relevant and meaningful
- ◆ developing networks of employees that have completed equality impact assessments to share practice
- ◆ publishing all completed equality impact assessments on SQA's equality webpage
- ◆ continue to ensure appropriate monitoring arrangements are in place

Measuring our progress

We will be able to measure our progress towards this outcome by considering:

- ◆ Improvements to SQA's employee monitoring data collection, analysis, reporting and action plans developed based on employee equality monitoring data.
- ◆ Any increase to the rate of completion for equality and diversity data and reduction in the number of 'prefer not to say' responses.
- ◆ Action plans developed linked to SQA survey results and progressed and publicised.
- ◆ People Survey participation rates remaining at the same level, or improving.
- ◆ Increase in positive responses to survey questions — in particular in relation to engagement, inclusion and fair treatment, organisational culture and discrimination, bullying and harassment.
- ◆ Staff survey action plans deliver change staff identify as linked to their survey feedback.
- ◆ Maintaining disability confident Level 2 accreditation and Stonewall Diversity Champion status.
- ◆ Achievement of disability confident leader status (Level 3) by 2025.
- ◆ Action plan developed and published for race equality with timescales and milestones.
- ◆ Achievement of milestones publicised.
- ◆ Increase in the employment of disabled and ethnic minority colleagues.
- ◆ Achievement of carer positive accreditation.
- ◆ Positive feedback from the Stonewall Scotland staff feedback questionnaire.
- ◆ Positive colleague feedback received relating to SQA policies via people survey.
- ◆ Positive colleague feedback received from a bespoke survey or focus groups related to equality and diversity.
- ◆ Equality and diversity training is mandatory for all colleagues.
- ◆ Reduction in the pay gap for gender, disability and ethnicity.

Protected characteristics

Equality outcome 1 has relevance across all protected characteristics. There is a particular focus on Disability and Race.

Evidence

- ◆ SQA employee monitoring data reports 2018-2020 (January 2021)
- ◆ SQA equal pay audits 2018-2020 (January 2021)
- ◆ Internal initiatives to increase level of employee equality information held by SQA
- ◆ Feedback from SQA's employee networks
- ◆ Consultation with SQA's trade unions including JEF (Joint Engagement Forum)
- ◆ Feedback from SQA's staff surveys 2018-2020
- ◆ Feedback from exit interviews and employee relations case work
- ◆ Consideration of local/national demographics
- ◆ Close the Gap [guidance](#) for reporting on gender and employment, equal pay and occupational segregation
- ◆ [Race Equality Framework 2016-30](#)
- ◆ [Scottish Government National Performance Framework](#)
- ◆ [Fair Work Convention and Framework](#)
- ◆ [Impacts of COVID-19 on equality in Scotland](#)
- ◆ [Is Scotland Fairer?](#) (2018)
- ◆ [How coronavirus has affected equality and human rights](#) (2020)
- ◆ [Scottish Government equality evidence finder](#)

Equality Outcome 2: Advance equality of opportunity and eliminate unlawful discrimination for all candidates by ensuring SQA's qualifications are as fair and accessible as possible

To help us achieve this outcome, we will:

- ◆ Refresh SQA's Equality Review of Qualifications process and guidance to ensure it is consistent across all qualification types and fit for purpose.
- ◆ Ensure that all qualifications being revised or developed are equality reviewed in line with the refreshed process and guidance by sampling a selection of course, unit and assessment specifications.
- ◆ Ensure all staff involved in the production of assessment materials receive appropriate training and have access to effective guidance on designing inclusive assessments.
- ◆ Ensure that all assessment questions, items or tasks, and the supporting marking instructions:
 - pose no unnecessary barriers to candidates in relation to any of the protected characteristics
 - reflect the full diversity of Scottish society and
 - are free from narrow, negative or stereotypical representations of different groups by sampling external examination question papers.
- ◆ Explore the assessment issues for candidates using new and emerging assistive technologies to ensure that candidates are not unduly disadvantaged, for example:
 - by investigating the implications for SQA's digital question papers and IT requirements of commonly provided/used devices, platforms, apps and software
 - by producing practical advice and guidance for centres
- ◆ Ensure that materials intended to support the delivery of qualifications, such as guidance, exemplar assessments, case studies and publicity material:
 - pose no unnecessary barriers to candidates in relation to any of the protected characteristics
 - reflect the full diversity of Scottish society and
 - are free from narrow, negative or stereotypical representations of
 - different groups by sampling these materials
- ◆ Ensure that technologies, other than assistive technologies, introduced to support the assessment and quality assurance of SQA's qualifications do not unduly disadvantage candidates and do not restrict the use of appropriate assessment arrangements.

Measuring our progress

We will be able to measure our progress towards this outcome by considering:

- ◆ Refreshed equality review process, guidance and training for all qualification types
- ◆ Progress relating to SQA's Equality Review of Qualifications process
- ◆ Feedback received from equality group stakeholders on accessibility of SQA's qualifications
- ◆ Current provision of assessment arrangements determined to have positive impact and deemed to be effective in providing access to SQA assessments
- ◆ Reduction in number and types of equality issues raised in relation to access to SQA's qualifications
- ◆ Reduction in the number of requests for exceptional assessment arrangements/reasonable adjustments for individual candidates as a measure of the accessibility of the assessment standard

Protected characteristics

Equality outcome 2 has relevance across all protected characteristics. There will be particular focus on Race relating the Race Equality in Education Programme Board (Curriculum Reform Workstream). Please read more about this work in [SQA's Equality Mainstreaming Report 2019–21](#).

Evidence

Equality outcome 2 is based on evidence of equality issues for candidates with protected characteristics. Internal and external evidence sources have been used, including both quantitative and qualitative evidence from a range of formal and anecdotal sources to inform the equality outcome.

Equality Outcome 3: Advance equality of opportunity for all candidates undertaking qualifications regulated by SQA Accreditation

SQA Accreditation has identified three objectives:

- ◆ Ensure that the use of digital technology with regards to online assessment and remote invigilation does not disadvantage candidates from a particular group.
- ◆ Ensure that, when reviewing National Occupational Standards and Qualification product submissions, the content does not refer to a specific gender (for example, 'cameraman').
- ◆ Through our audit and providing monitoring activities, ensure that the equal opportunity policies of awarding bodies and providers are appropriate and list all of the protected characteristics.

Protected characteristics

Equality outcome 3 has relevance across all protected characteristics.

Measuring our progress

We will be able to measure our progress towards this outcome by considering:

- ◆ Improvements to relevant awarding body policies, and processes.
- ◆ Evidence of the implementation of awarding body policies and their approved providers.
- ◆ Evidence of implementation.

Detailed action plans and milestones will be agreed to take forward this work.