

Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment: 2023–24 National Qualifications Standards and Awarding

Section 1: Background and context

Approach to impact assessment

SQA supports lifelong learning, and awards qualifications to learners of all ages, but many learners taking SQA graded National Courses are aged 15–17 and in the category of children and young people. SQA has reviewed the approach to standards and awarding for National Courses 2024 for potential impacts on children’s rights and wellbeing. This document summarises the evidence we have found. The approach to standards and awarding can be found in the [2024 Methodology Report](#).

SQA reviewed the available evidence in light of its duties as the statutory national awarding body in Scotland for qualifications other than degrees. These duties are set out in the Education (Scotland) Act 1996, as amended.

In January and February 2024, the high-level approach to awarding was presented to the Board of Management, the NQ Strategic Group and the NQ Partner Communications Group. These groups include representatives from the following stakeholders:

- ◆ Scottish Qualifications Authority
- ◆ Scottish Youth Parliament
- ◆ Student Participation In Quality Scotland
- ◆ National Parent Forum of Scotland
- ◆ Scottish Government
- ◆ Education Scotland
- ◆ Colleges Scotland
- ◆ Universities Scotland
- ◆ School Leaders Scotland
- ◆ Scottish Council of Independent Schools
- ◆ Association of Directors of Education in Scotland
- ◆ Educational Institute for Scotland
- ◆ Scottish Secondary Teachers Association (SSTA)
- ◆ National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT)

Section 4 sets out the assessment of the impact of the standards and awarding approach in session 2023–24 for National Courses on the rights and wellbeing of children and young people.

Section 2: CRWIA Stage 1 Screening: key questions

1 Name the policy and describe its overall aims

Standards and Awarding 2024

The approach to standards and awarding in 2024 describes how standards will be set and maintained during the awarding process this year. The approach outlines how, during awarding in 2024, SQA aims to deliver on its commitment to fairness and to the maintenance of standards over time.

2 What aspects of this policy will affect children and young people up to the age of 18?

SQA supports lifelong learning and awards qualifications to learners across the age spectrum, but many learners taking SQA graded National Courses are aged 15–17 and in the category of children and young people. Therefore, all aspects of arrangements for assessing NQs in 2024 have the potential to affect those children and young people taking SQA graded National Courses in 2024.

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

The arrangements for assessing NQs in 2024 will enable children and young people to complete their selected NQ courses and be awarded grades that reflect their achievement. They will be able to celebrate their attainment, and then progress to continued education, training or employment where entry relies on SQA grades.

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

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

5 Will this require a CRWIA?

While there is no formal or legal requirement for SQA to undertake or publish a Children’s Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment, SQA recognises that arrangements for awarding and determining grade boundaries for NQs in 2024 will impact children and young people. In line with good practice, SQA has described in this document its arrangements for assessing NQs in 2024, and actions adopted to maximise positive impacts and minimise negative impacts. SQA respects the rights of the child described in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights.

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

SQA considers that the following articles are particularly relevant to awarding and grade boundary processes in session 2023–24:

- ◆ Article 2: non-discrimination
- ◆ Article 3: best interests of the child
- ◆ Article 12: respect for the views of the child
- ◆ Article 17: access to information from the media
- ◆ Article 23: children with a disability
- ◆ Article 28: right to education
- ◆ Article 29: goals of education

The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) child-friendly descriptors have been set out below.

Article 2: non-discrimination

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

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

Article 3: best interests of the child

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

Article 12: respect for the views of the child

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

Article 17: right to information

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

Article 23: children with disabilities

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

Article 28: right to education

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

Article 29: aims of education

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

Section 4: Assessment of impact and mitigations

Key elements

This part of the impact assessment further examines the key elements related to the approach to standards and awarding in 2024, in line with the relevant UNCRC Articles as outlined in section 3.2.2, and considers:

- ◆ whether the arrangements may have different impacts on different groups of children and young people
- ◆ what mitigating actions might be adopted if a potential negative impact was identified for any area of rights or any group of children and young people
 - ◆ where the approach to standards and awarding in 2024 can contribute to the wellbeing of children and young people in Scotland.

Potential impacts on children and young people

Awarding is a key component of SQA's statutory duties and responsibilities, as outlined in [SQA Awarding Code of Practice](#). The process of setting grade boundaries and awarding involves using a mixture of specific subject expertise combined with available qualitative and quantitative evidence to evaluate how the course assessment has performed. The process aims to ensure the level of demand for a qualification, and the standard, is set appropriately for the qualification. Once the appropriate grade boundaries are determined, the standard is applied consistently to all children and young people. Information about the identities and protected characteristics of individual children and young people and the centres they attend is not available to the panel who make awarding decisions. This process ensures that awarding is objective and eliminates prejudice and discrimination (Articles 2, 3 and 29).

SQA believes that using well-established processes for awarding and certification treats all children and young people fairly and equitably. In this way, the expertise of SQA principal assessors, working with senior SQA staff in making judgements based on the performance of children and young people, protects the credibility of the qualifications (Articles 2 and 29). The stakeholder groups mentioned in Section 1 above did not raise any concerns about the potential impact of the processes on children and young people with protected characteristics. However, ongoing monitoring will be necessary to ensure that this remains the case (Articles 2 and 23). SQA has additional processes in place (for example Assessment Arrangements, and the Exceptional Examination Circumstances Consideration Service) to support disabled children and young people. These ensure that these learners are not disadvantaged in the external assessment, and allow their grade to reflect their demonstrated attainment. This ensures that they are not disadvantaged during the awarding and grade boundary process (Article 23).

One of the benefits of the exam diet is that it ensures all children and young people undertake the same assessment, at the same time, under the same conditions. This ensures the approach to awarding and grade boundaries in 2024 meets SQA's equality responsibilities and requirements as an awarding body (Articles 12 and 23).

In 2023–24, awarding operated using our well-established procedures to evaluate the performance of the course assessment, which included consideration of the impact of the return to full course assessment for many courses. This meant changes to assessment including:

- ◆ reintroduction of coursework components (projects, assignments, dissertations)
- ◆ reintroduction of optional content into question papers
- ◆ extension of content to be examined in question papers
- ◆ reintroduction of exam component

For some courses, modifications made to mitigate the impact of the pandemic have been made permanent. This is where there was evidence of a positive impact of the modifications on the validity of the assessment, while allowing children and young people to demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding.

For further information, please see the [CRWIA for SQA's Course Modifications](#).

Steps taken by SQA to mitigate impacts

Awarding meetings took account of how the course assessments functioned and any factors that may have impacted on learner performance, including the changes to assessment listed above. Awarding decisions were informed by the full range of relevant qualitative and quantitative data, and included additional data from 2019 to help gauge the impact of the return to full course assessment for the courses affected. Every awarding meeting gave full consideration to whether the return of these arrangements enabled children and young people to perform more strongly than in previous years.

SQA anticipated that the return to full course assessment, particularly the reintroduction of coursework, could affect outcomes at all levels. Special attention was given to the impact of the return of coursework at Higher and Advanced Higher, where it was anticipated that its unfamiliarity to learners might be a particular issue. Coursework — as an additional, non-exam-based approach to assessment — allowed learners to evidence their knowledge and skills more appropriately or effectively. However, where learners experienced coursework assessment for the first time, it was recognised that this may not produce positive outcomes in all cases, particularly if there had been an impact on skills development due to prior learning experiences.

This year's approach to awarding and grade boundaries was made as transparent and accessible as possible through a series of communications aimed at learners (Articles 17 and 29). SQA maintains open communication through its social media channels and articles and video content on the SQA website. SQA consults with children and young people to ensure all communications and publications issued relating to awarding and grade boundaries are age-appropriate and accessible to disabled children and young people or those with additional support needs.

The awarding procedure and grade boundary decisions applied to all children and young people regardless of their protected characteristic (Articles 2 and 23). This process ensured the best interests of children and young people (Article 3) and ensured those with disabilities

are given an opportunity to demonstrate their attainment in an assessment that meets national standards (Articles 23 and 29). The exam diet contributes to children and young people's right to education (Article 28) and ensures they are assessed in an objective, fair and equitable manner (Articles 2 and 29).