

All elements of SQA's role in terms of enabling the awarding accreditation of national qualifications involve marking taking place "blind"; this prevents any conscious or unconscious bias in terms of the marking of papers and in respect of any appeals process, and the potential to inadvertently misrepresent the attainment gap in terms of assessor judgement. And prior to this, question papers are written to allow equal access to all learners and not create disadvantage from particular Additionally, when setting grade boundaries, the processes are deliberately blind to protected characteristics and other characteristics, the focus being on determinations of grade boundaries in relation to standards and particularly performance standards – ie the quality of demonstration of knowledge, understanding and skills.

SQA have completed an EQIA into the approach to qualifications in 2021/22 and while it does not specifically cover socio-economic characteristics (they are not protected characteristics), this did not identify any significant equality issues. ~~[tbc]~~.

On the assumption that exams will take place in 2022, there is a risk that we will see a widening of the attainment gap compared to the last two years, to reflect a position closer to 2019 between 2021 and 2019, because of the different approach to assessment. SQA consider that the apparent narrowing of the attainment gap in 2020 and 2021 in the main reflects the grade distribution and increased numbers achieving a grade C~~n~~A under the alternative certification model, rather than a genuine change in educational outcomes or experience.

~~This however takes~~ It is worth bearing in mind that qualifications do not operate in a vacuum and there have been other initiatives designed to address the attainment gap in a broader educational and societal context since 2019. These initiatives may have a positive impact on the attainment gap as reflected in exam results, but these are interventions that have a broader reach than the exams/qualifications system.

From a qualifications point of view, SG has committed to boosting in-person Easter study support provision revision to try and address attainment gap issues. Officials are working with local government to increase support where appropriate, ensuring resources for targeted Easter study support provision are available. To complement and enhance school-based supports, Education Scotland is putting in place a package of supports, including support for learners through e-sgoil and attainment advisors, and on-line webinars for teachers and lecturers.