

HiQual UK

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICY

HQUK-POL-EDI-001

Document Control Item	Details
Organisation	HiQual UK
Policy Title	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy
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Policy Owner	Sarah Williams, Head of Quality Assurance
Approved By	HiQual UK Academic and Standards Committee
Review Cycle	Annual, or earlier where legal, regulatory, operational or organisational changes require review
Classification	Public Policy
Applies To	Learners, Approved Centres, Assessors, Internal Quality Assurers, Tutors, Invigilators, HiQual UK Personnel, Contractors and Relevant Stakeholders

Commitment to fairness, equal opportunity, dignity, respect and inclusive access

1. Purpose

HiQual UK is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across its qualifications, assessment arrangements, centres, services and organisational activities.

The purpose of this policy is to establish a clear framework for preventing unlawful discrimination, promoting fair treatment, supporting inclusive participation and ensuring that decisions affecting learners and stakeholders are made fairly and consistently.

HiQual UK recognises that people may have different needs and circumstances and will seek to remove unreasonable barriers to participation, assessment and progression while maintaining the integrity and standards of its qualifications.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all HiQual UK activities and to persons involved in the development, delivery, assessment, quality assurance, administration or governance of HiQual UK qualifications and services.

It applies to learners, prospective learners, Approved Centres, assessors, internal quality assurers, tutors, invigilators, HiQual UK personnel, contractors, committee members and other persons acting on behalf of or in connection with HiQual UK.

3. Policy Commitment

HiQual UK will seek to ensure that:

3.1 Equality of Opportunity

Individuals have fair opportunities to access, participate in and benefit from HiQual UK qualifications and services, subject to legitimate qualification requirements.

3.2 Respect and Dignity

Everyone is treated with dignity, courtesy and respect and is not subjected to unacceptable discriminatory or harassing behaviour.

3.3 Inclusion

HiQual UK will consider accessibility and inclusion when designing qualifications, assessments, communications and services.

3.4 Fair and Consistent Decisions

Academic, assessment, centre and organisational decisions will be based on relevant criteria and evidence rather than irrelevant personal characteristics.

3.5 Accessibility

HiQual UK will seek to identify and reduce avoidable barriers for learners and other stakeholders, including through appropriate reasonable adjustments where applicable.

4. Equality and Diversity Principles

HiQual UK will operate according to the following principles:

4.1 Non-Discrimination

HiQual UK will not tolerate unlawful discrimination, victimisation or harassment in connection with its activities.

4.2 Fairness

Fair treatment does not necessarily mean identical treatment. Appropriate adjustments or proportionate support may be required to provide equitable access while preserving assessment validity and standards.

4.3 Inclusion

People from different backgrounds, experiences and circumstances should be able to participate in HiQual UK activities without unnecessary barriers.

4.4 Merit and Competence

Selection, appointment, assessment, quality assurance and academic decisions will be based on relevant competence, evidence and requirements.

4.5 Confidentiality

Personal information relating to equality, diversity or accessibility matters will be handled sensitively and in accordance with applicable data protection requirements.

5. Protected Characteristics and Personal Circumstances

HiQual UK recognises that discrimination may occur because of characteristics or circumstances protected by applicable law. In the UK context, this includes protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

HiQual UK will also consider other relevant personal circumstances where they may create barriers to fair participation, provided that doing so is consistent with applicable requirements and the integrity of the qualification or assessment.

6. Direct and Indirect Discrimination

HiQual UK will seek to prevent both direct and indirect discrimination.

Direct discrimination occurs where a person is treated less favourably because of a relevant protected characteristic.

Indirect discrimination may occur where a provision, criterion or practice applies to everyone but places persons sharing a protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage and cannot be objectively justified where the law requires justification.

7. Harassment and Victimisation

HiQual UK does not tolerate harassment, bullying or other unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Victimisation of a person because they have raised a genuine concern, supported another person's concern or exercised a relevant right is not acceptable.

Concerns may be managed under the Complaints Policy, relevant disciplinary arrangements, safeguarding procedures or other applicable processes.

8. Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

HiQual UK will maintain arrangements for considering reasonable adjustments and special consideration where appropriate.

Adjustments should remove or reduce unnecessary barriers without compromising the competence, learning outcomes or validity of the assessment unless the applicable qualification requirements expressly permit otherwise.

Requests should be considered consistently, confidentially and on the basis of appropriate evidence where evidence is reasonably required.

This policy should be read alongside the Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy.

9. Inclusive Assessment

HiQual UK will seek to ensure that assessment arrangements are fair and accessible while maintaining the required academic or occupational standards.

Assessment design should consider accessibility, clarity of instructions, avoidable barriers and the needs of diverse learners where reasonably practicable.

Assessment personnel must not make assumptions about a learner's ability based on personal characteristics.

10. Qualification and Assessment Design

Where practicable, equality and accessibility considerations will be incorporated into qualification development and review.

HiQual UK may consider whether qualification requirements, assessment methods, delivery arrangements or communications create unnecessary barriers.

Where a requirement is essential to the competence being assessed, it will not be removed solely for convenience. Instead, HiQual UK will consider whether an appropriate adjustment or alternative arrangement can preserve the intended standard.

11. Approved Centre Responsibilities

Approved Centres are expected to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in their delivery of HiQual UK qualifications.

Centres must:

11.1 Centre Requirements

Treat learners fairly and with dignity and respect.

Provide information about relevant support and adjustment arrangements.

Apply assessment requirements consistently.

Identify and address discriminatory or harassing behaviour.

Maintain appropriate confidentiality when handling sensitive learner information.

Cooperate with HiQual UK where equality or accessibility concerns affect a HiQual UK qualification.

Ensure staff involved in delivery and assessment understand their relevant equality and inclusion responsibilities.

12. HiQual UK Responsibilities

HiQual UK will maintain appropriate oversight of equality, diversity and inclusion within its own activities and within the aspects of centre delivery for which it has responsibility.

HiQual UK will provide appropriate policies, procedures and guidance, monitor relevant quality information and take proportionate action where evidence identifies a material equality or inclusion concern.

13. Governance and Accountability

The Governing Board has overall responsibility for ensuring that appropriate organisational arrangements exist to support equality and inclusion.

The Academic and Standards Committee provides oversight where equality, accessibility or inclusion matters may affect academic standards, assessment validity, qualification integrity or learner protection.

The Head of Quality Assurance is responsible for coordinating relevant quality assurance activity and escalating significant or systemic concerns.

14. Equality Impact Considerations

Where appropriate, HiQual UK will consider equality and accessibility implications when developing or materially changing policies, qualifications, assessments, procedures or services.

Such consideration may include identifying potentially affected groups, identifying barriers, considering reasonable alternatives and documenting relevant decisions.

15. Recruitment, Appointment and Governance

HiQual UK will seek to ensure that recruitment, appointment and selection decisions are based on relevant skills, experience, competence and organisational requirements.

Reasonable steps will be taken to avoid discriminatory criteria or processes.

Where appropriate and lawful, HiQual UK may use positive action or other lawful measures intended to address disadvantage or improve participation.

16. Training and Awareness

HiQual UK will promote awareness of equality, diversity and inclusion responsibilities among relevant personnel.

Training or guidance may be provided to assessors, internal quality assurers, tutors, centre personnel, committee members and other persons whose role may affect learners or academic decisions.

Training needs may be identified through monitoring, complaints, incidents, quality reviews or changes in requirements.

17. Complaints and Reporting Concerns

Any person who believes they have experienced discrimination, harassment, victimisation or unfair treatment in connection with HiQual UK may raise a concern through the appropriate reporting route.

Concerns about service or organisational treatment may be managed under the Complaints Policy. Matters involving safeguarding, serious misconduct, malpractice or other specialist issues may be referred to the relevant procedure.

HiQual UK will seek to handle concerns fairly, confidentially and without unreasonable delay.

18. Malpractice and Equality Concerns

Equality or accessibility concerns that indicate assessment malpractice, maladministration or deliberate unfair treatment may be referred under the Malpractice and Maladministration Policy.

HiQual UK will distinguish legitimate requests for support or adjustment from conduct intended to obtain an unfair assessment advantage.

19. Data Protection and Confidentiality

HiQual UK will handle personal information relating to equality, diversity, disability, accessibility or support needs sensitively and in accordance with applicable data protection requirements.

Information will be accessed and shared only where there is a legitimate purpose and appropriate authority.

Sensitive information should not be disclosed unnecessarily to assessors, centre staff, committees or other persons.

20. Monitoring and Quality Assurance

HiQual UK will use appropriate quality assurance information to identify potential equality or inclusion issues.

Monitoring may consider complaints, appeals, reasonable adjustment requests, assessment outcomes, centre monitoring findings, learner feedback and other relevant information.

Monitoring will be proportionate and will respect confidentiality and data protection requirements.

21. Positive Action and Support

Where appropriate and lawful, HiQual UK may take proportionate steps to support participation by persons who experience disadvantage or barriers.

Support may include accessible information, reasonable adjustments, staff guidance, alternative communication formats or other proportionate measures.

22. Religious and Cultural Considerations

HiQual UK will seek to consider relevant religious or cultural needs where doing so is reasonably practicable and consistent with qualification and assessment requirements.

Requests will be considered fairly and consistently. Where a requirement is essential to the assessment or qualification standard, HiQual UK will explain the applicable constraints and consider whether an appropriate alternative is available.

23. Pregnancy, Maternity and Caring Responsibilities

HiQual UK will seek to avoid unfair disadvantage arising from pregnancy, maternity or relevant caring circumstances.

Where appropriate, special consideration, reasonable adjustments, alternative arrangements or other support may be considered under applicable procedures.

24. Disability and Accessibility

HiQual UK recognises that disability may create barriers to participation or assessment.

Reasonable adjustments and accessible arrangements will be considered in accordance with applicable requirements and the Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy.

Adjustments will be designed to provide access without compromising the competence or standard that an assessment is intended to measure.

25. Monitoring of Centres

Equality, diversity and inclusion may form part of centre monitoring where relevant to learner experience, assessment fairness, accessibility or compliance.

Where concerns are identified, HiQual UK may require corrective action, additional monitoring, staff development or other proportionate measures.

26. Breaches of this Policy

Where a breach is established, HiQual UK may take proportionate corrective or disciplinary action under the applicable procedure.

Possible actions may include guidance, training, corrective action plans, enhanced monitoring, restrictions on relevant activity, or referral to an appropriate disciplinary or governance process.

27. Non-Retaliation

HiQual UK will not tolerate retaliation against a person who raises a genuine equality, diversity or inclusion concern or participates appropriately in an investigation.

Concerns about retaliation may be escalated through the Complaints Policy, Whistleblowing Policy or other applicable process.

28. Conflicts of Interest

Anyone involved in making a decision concerning an equality, diversity or inclusion matter must declare actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest.

Where a conflict could reasonably affect impartiality, the person should not participate in the relevant decision.

29. Policy Exceptions

Any exception to this policy must be justified, documented and approved by an appropriately authorised person or governance body.

No exception may be used to permit unlawful discrimination, victimisation or harassment or to undermine learner protection or assessment integrity.

30. Policy Review

This policy will be reviewed at least annually and sooner where required by changes in applicable law, regulatory expectations, qualification arrangements, organisational structure, quality findings or lessons learned.

The Policy Owner will recommend amendments to the appropriate governance authority for approval.

31. Related Policies and Procedures

This policy should be read alongside:

- Academic Governance Policy
- Quality Assurance Policy
- Assessment Policy
- Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration Policy
- Appeals Policy
- Complaints Policy
- Malpractice and Maladministration Policy
- Learner Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Conflicts of Interest Policy
- Data Protection and Privacy Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Centre Recognition Policy
- Centre Monitoring Policy
- Records Management and Retention Policy
- Risk Management Policy

32. Document Control

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33. Version Control

Version	Date	Description of Change	Author	Approval
1.0	1 June 2026	Initial publication of HiQual UK Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy	Sarah Williams, Head of Quality Assurance	Academic and Standards Committee

34. Policy Statement

HiQual UK is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and to ensuring that learners and stakeholders are treated fairly, with dignity and respect.

HiQual UK will seek to remove unnecessary barriers to participation and assessment, provide appropriate reasonable adjustments where applicable, and prevent unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Equality and inclusion considerations will form part of HiQual UK's quality assurance and governance arrangements while maintaining the integrity, validity and standards of its qualifications.

END OF POLICY