



Department
for Education

National Standards for Personal, Social and Employability Qualifications

Equalities impact assessment

March 2024

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Public Sector Equality Duty

This document records the analysis undertaken by the Department for Education to enable Ministers to fulfil the requirements placed on them by the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) as set out on in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. The PSED requires the Secretary of State to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act.
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The relevant 'protected characteristics' for the purposes of the Public Sector Equality Duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including ethnicity)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Introduction

Personal, Social and Employability (PSE) qualifications play an important part in our further education landscape. Individuals who take these qualifications are some of our most vulnerable students. We are committed to equality of opportunity and inclusion and are reforming these qualifications to drive up quality to deliver the best outcomes for these students. By doing this, we hope to promote students' ability to progress up the ladder of opportunity to achieve employment and personal life ambitions.

In October 2022, following the consultation on the [Review of post-16 qualifications at level 2 and below](#), the government committed to reform Personal, Social and Employability Qualifications (PSEQs) by producing new national standards in response to the consultation. The qualifications in scope of this reform include:

- Personal and Social Development
- Independent Living
- Employability

Proposal and rationale

The aim of the proposed National Standards is to improve student outcomes by defining what PSEQs will need to provide to receive public funding in future. Alongside the new draft National Standards, the government has proposed:

- Two types of qualifications that can be designed from the standards.
- A range for the guided learning hours (GLH), from 55-160.

The lower GLH limit is suggested to ensure qualifications are a sufficient size to be meaningful, and the upper size limit provides more time for those who need that to confidently acquire the learning and provides more scope for broad coverage within the PSEQs.

These qualifications serve a diverse cohort of students including adults, young people, and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). To develop standards that meet these needs, we have worked with panels of experts representing these different groups.

We have published these proposals and the draft National Standards for PSEQs in a public consultation. We are publishing this equality impact assessment now to set out what we know about the students who currently take these qualifications (i.e. demographic information and outcomes). Our plans aim to ensure they deliver not just improvements on the previous PSE qualifications, but the best outcomes for these students.

Whilst we have set out how we developed the draft standards with protected groups in mind with our expert panels, the public consultation is the next opportunity to test our proposals with wider stakeholders, to ensure they will meet the needs of all groups. It is an opportunity to build on the draft standards and proposals by actively harnessing the views of these groups and build them into our policy development before publishing these developments in response. We will also ensure that should negative impacts be anticipated for any group, we will set out necessary mitigation.

This equalities impact assessment accompanies the consultation to provide an overview of potential equalities impacts resulting from these reforms and will cover all those studying PSEQs in post-16 education. Where students are identified as being disproportionately likely to be affected, we expect the impact of the proposals to be generally positive for all students, through an improved qualification landscape that is high-quality and better equips students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels, or independent living. Some students identified as being disproportionately likely to be affected are based on PSE qualifications that fall outside of the 55-160 GLH range we are proposing for the future qualifications landscape. As a result, they are likely to be impacted to a greater extent, than those already studying PSE qualifications within the proposed size range. We believe this should not have a negative impact as 55 GLH is small enough to be accessible to those with less time to study, while still providing enough content to provide meaningful outcomes for students.

Wherever the new qualification sits within the GLH range, we expect the new standards will better equip students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels, or independent living. Another aim of these reforms is to streamline the system and make it easier to navigate, meaning there will be fewer PSEQs on offer in future. We believe every student currently taking a PSE qualification would be able to access an appropriate PSEQ in the reformed offer. Furthermore, we are still funding qualifications at every level from entry level 1 to level 1, so every student should be able to access a qualification in future at the appropriate level for them.

In summary, we expect these policy proposals to promote the advancing of equality for those who would study PSEQs through an improved qualification landscape that is high-quality. However, we will reconsider this in light of any relevant evidence, including consultation responses.

The consultation, including proposals and the draft standards are available here

([DfE consultations on GOV.UK](#))

For the overall impact of the post-16 qualifications review at level 2 and below, please refer to the impact assessment that was published in our [consultation response](#).

Methodology

This section outlines the methodology behind the equalities impact assessment (EIA) and provides the data underlying the figures shown in the document. This analysis provides a breakdown of learner characteristics for enrolments funded under the 16-19 study programme for qualifications on identified PSE qualifications, compared to all approved qualifications at level 3 or below.

Data and data sources

Qualifications

The ESFA approves qualifications for government funding for students aged 14 and older. The equalities impact assessment is based on qualifications approved for funding at level 3 or below in the 2021/22 academic year.

Students

The equalities impact assessment uses enrolments funded under the 16-19 study programme. This includes enrolments for:

- 16-19 High Needs Students
- 16-19 Students (excluding high needs students)
- 19-24 Students with an EHCP
- 19+ Continuing Students (excluding EHCP)
- 14-16 Direct Funded Students

It also uses enrolments funded through the Adult Education Budget and Advance Learner Loans.

Student background information

Each qualification is linked to enrolment information for the full 2021/22 academic year. Enrolment information is taken from the Individualised Learner Record (ILR)¹ and, in the case of learners funded through 16-19 study programmes, the school census. The qualifications data is also linked with information on student characteristics. This comes from two sources:

1. The Young Persons Matched Administrative Dataset (YPMAD)² 2021/22 provides information on student characteristics as recorded in the school census at age 15. These include:

¹ This is the information about students and the learning they undertake, in the further education (FE) and skills sector, that publicly funded colleges, training organisations, local authorities and employers (FE providers) must collect and return to the DfE. The ILR data source for this analysis is the final collection of 2021/22 and includes information on provision for the full academic year.

² This records information on the highest level of attainment and qualification studied each academic year matched to individual personal characteristics, as recorded in the school census at age 15.

- Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Ethnic background

The YPMAD also provides information on prior GCSE or equivalent in English and maths where available.

2. The ILR provides characteristics information, mainly for the adult-funded groups who may not have data in the school census. Characteristics information in the ILR include ethnic background and learning difficulties and disabilities (LLDD). These are self-reported so may not be as reliable as the information from the YPMAD.
3. Data on level of deprivation is included for all ages. This is based on the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), part of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The index gives a score to each postcode area representing the proportion of children under 16 in each area who are income-deprived. Scores for students' home postcode areas are grouped into bands 1 (most deprived) to 5 (least deprived).

Consideration of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010

This section considers whether reforms to PSE qualifications are likely to have a disproportionate impact on students with protected characteristics, or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Our assessment is based on comparing the characteristics of enrolments on identified PSE qualifications, against those on qualifications at Level 1 and below as a whole. We also compare the characteristics of enrolments on PSE qualifications in general, against those on PSE qualifications within the 55-160 GLH range that will be permitted in the future.

As highlighted, where students are identified as being disproportionately likely to be affected, we expect the impact of the proposals to be generally positive, through an improved qualification landscape that is high-quality and better equips students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels, or independent living. We think that these reforms have the potential to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Table 1: 16-19 Enrolments and Characteristics at Level 1 and below, 2021/22

	Level 1 and Below	PSE Qualifications	PSE Qualifications (55-160 GLH)
No. Quals	3,150	709	350
16-19 Study Programme Enrolments ³	334,000	43,000	15,000
% Female	37%	41%	37%
% White	56%	64%	61%
% Mixed	4%	5%	4%
% Asian (inc. Chinese)	8%	8%	9%
% Black	6%	7%	5%
% Other	2%	2%	2%

³ Figures rounded to the nearest 1,000

% Unknown	24%	15%	19%
% SEN Support	19%	17%	14%
% EHCP	21%	29%	49%
% FSM	27%	28%	30%
% IDACI 1 (Most disadvantaged)	37%	33%	33%
% IDACI 2	26%	25%	25%
% IDACI 3	17%	17%	18%
% IDACI 4	12%	14%	13%
% IDACI 5 (Least disadvantaged)	8%	11%	11%

Table 2: Adult Education Budget and Advanced Learner Loan Enrolments and Characteristics at Level 1 and below, 2021/22

	Level 1 and Below	PSE Qualifications	PSE Qualifications (55-160 GLH)
No. Quals	3,150	709	350
Adult Enrolments ⁴	547,000	79,000	39,000
% Female	58%	49%	47%
% White	45%	58%	55%
% Mixed	5%	5%	5%
% Asian (inc. Chinese)	19%	15%	16%
% Black	16%	14%	14%
% Other	12%	7%	8%
% Unknown	2%	1%	2%

⁴ Figures rounded to the nearest 1,000

% LLDD	17%	23%	20%
% IDACI 1 (Most disadvantaged)	43%	41%	43%
% IDACI 2	28%	27%	27%
% IDACI 3	16%	16%	16%
% IDACI 4	8%	9%	9%
% IDACI 5 (Least disadvantaged)	5%	6%	6%

Age: overall impact positive

The proposals outlined in this impact assessment will impact students aged 16 and above.

Table 1 shows that there were c.43,000 enrolments through 16-19 study programmes for PSE qualifications, compared to c.79,000 through the Adult Education Budget and Advanced Learner Loans shown in Table 2.

This indicates that the reforms are more likely to impact adults than 16–19-year-olds, with PSE qualifications representing 15% of adult enrolments at Level 1 and below, compared to 13% of 16–19-year-old enrolments.

When proposing the size range of these qualifications, we have considered the needs of adults who often need smaller qualifications, while ensuring the qualifications are of a sufficient size to be meaningful.

We expect the changes to these qualifications would result in improvements for all students, including adults, studying the new PSEQs as the proposals are designed to create better outcomes by improving the quality of qualifications. This will better equip these students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels or independent living.

Race: overall impact positive

As shown in Table 1, amongst 16–19-year-old students we would expect the PSE reforms to have a particular impact on those from white backgrounds, as they are more highly represented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly. The data suggests that students from mixed and black backgrounds may also be particularly affected.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would similarly be likely to particularly impact those from white backgrounds, as well as those from mixed and black backgrounds.

However, it is important to note the significant proportion with no recorded data on ethnic background, which means the potential impacts on 16–19-year-old students from different ethnic backgrounds must be treated with caution.

Table 2 shows that amongst adult students, based on their representation, we would expect the reforms to PSE qualifications to particularly impact those from white backgrounds as they are overrepresented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would similarly be likely to particularly impact those white backgrounds. We expect the changes to these qualifications would result in improvements for all students, including those ethnic backgrounds identified above, studying the new PSEQs as the proposals are designed to create better outcomes by improving the quality of qualifications. This will better equip these students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels or independent living.

Disability and SEND: overall impact positive

Table 1 shows that amongst 16–19-year-old students we would expect the PSE reforms to have a particular impact on those with SEND, as they are overrepresented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly. When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would be likely to particularly impact those who received SEN support, but less likely to impact those with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Similarly, table 2 shows that amongst adult students we would expect the reforms to PSE qualifications to particularly impact those with learning difficulties or disabilities, as they are overrepresented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would similarly be likely to particularly impact those with learning difficulties or disabilities.

We expect the changes to these qualifications would result in improvements for all students, including those with SEND and disabilities, studying the new PSEQs as the proposals are designed to create better outcomes by improving the quality of qualifications. This will better equip students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels or independent living.

Sex: overall impact positive

As shown in Table 1, amongst 16–19-year-old students we would expect the PSE reforms to have a particular impact on women, as they are overrepresented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would similarly be likely to particularly impact women.

Table 2 shows that amongst adult students we would expect the reforms to PSE qualifications to particularly impact men, as they are overrepresented on PSE qualifications, when compared to qualifications at level 1 and below more broadly.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would in contrast be likely to particularly impact women.

We expect the changes to these qualifications would result in improvements for all students, irrespective of sex, studying the new PSEs as the proposals are designed to create better outcomes by improving the quality of qualifications. This will better equip these students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels or independent living.

Disadvantage: overall impact positive

While not a protected characteristic, we also recognise the importance of ensuring the proposals have a positive impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Table 1 shows that amongst 16–19-year-olds, it is a mixed picture for disadvantaged students with a slightly greater proportion of enrolments on PSE qualifications having received free school meals (FSM) at age 15, than those studying at Level 1 and below more broadly. However, a lower proportion are classified as being in the most disadvantaged areas via the IDACI classification.

When looking just at those studying PSE qualifications, the proposed size criteria would be unlikely to particularly impact those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Table 2 suggests that the reforms to PSE qualifications are unlikely to have a disproportionate impact on adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. This includes the proposed size criteria.

We expect the changes to these qualifications would result in improvements for all students studying the new PSEs as the proposals are designed to create better outcomes by improving the quality of qualifications. This will better equip these students for progression into employment, further study at higher levels or independent living.

Other Characteristics

We do not currently have data on gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief or sexual orientation of students. We do not have reason to believe that the reforms should have a disproportionate impact on students with other characteristics.

As outlined throughout the Impact Assessment, we would expect the impact of the proposals to be generally positive for all students, through an improved qualification landscape that is high-quality and better equips students for progression into employment, further study or independent living

We will continue to assess any potential equalities considerations in line with further policy development and any further evidence that becomes available through the consultation or otherwise. In addition, we will consider the impact of the proposals presented here, alongside those previously outlined for the qualification reforms at level 2.

Monitor and Review

The Public Sector Equality Duty is a continuing duty, and the public authority is required to keep the equalities impacts of a policy proposal under review. Accordingly, this EIA will be reviewed regularly following an analysis of relevant data. Our next opportunity to update it will be after analysing responses to our public consultation, following which we will update and publish later in 2024.



Department
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