1 May 2020

Lynn Welsh
Head of Scotland EHRC Scotland Legal and Compliance
By email: lynn.welsh@equalityhumanrights.com

Contact: Fiona.Robertson@sqa.org.uk

Dear Lynn

Thank you for your letter of 28th April 2020 in relation to the development of SQA's Alternative Certification Model to recognise learner achievement in as fair a way as possible in these unprecedented times.

In your letter you raise concerns in relation to the following document - Information for Centres Producing Estimates Session 2019–20 – published by SQA last week. In particular, that the document does not recognise the potential risk of bias when centres are making judgements about learners' achievements and deciding the rank order of candidates.

We recognise fully the importance of potential bias in decision-making. In addition to the above information, SQA has produced, and is promoting, an online course to support teachers and lecturers making refined estimate and rank order decisions. To date this has received 6708 views by 1927 users. This course provides specific advice on mitigating bias. An extract from this course may be found in the appendix to this letter.

Additionally, I am pleased that you have accepted our offer to discuss this issue with my colleagues responsible for carrying out the Equality Impact Assessment. I understand this will take place later today with your colleague, **NR** It is important that we continue to have this dialogue and I welcome your advice.

Thank you once again for your engagement on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

Fiona Robertson
Chief Executive

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Chief Executive: Fiona Robertson

01 May 2020

Bias

Any discussion of fairness must take account of the possibility of bias. When coming to a decision about a candidate's estimate, you must try to detach yourself from the individual in order to be as objective and as 'standard' in your decisions as possible.

Special mention must be made of what might be called 'implicit bias'. Implicit bias originates from assumptions or stereotypes based on characteristics such as background, gender, disability, race and ethnicity. Research has strongly suggested that implicit bias may be a contributing factor to assessment judgements, and it is for this reason that SQA's normal e-marking procedures includes the suppression of personal candidate data. In the absence of these procedures this year, we need you to think about potential bias in relation to the estimates you are providing.

Candidate evidence should be valued for its own worth and merit as an indicator of course assessment, and a conscious effort should be made to consider and avoid the negative impact of potential implicit bias. You should do this as you finalise your estimates and ranking by considering the accuracy of the decisions you make alongside candidate data on background, gender, disability, race and ethnicity, at both class and cohort presentation level.

Moderation across departments, learning areas and faculties will ensure fairness for all candidates and ensure that robust standards are maintained.

(Extract from SQA Academy online course on Estimates – Diet 2020).