



FAIR ACCESS POLICY



Version Number	Date	Purpose of Change	Classification	Sign Off
V4.1	14/11/2025	Merging of EPA and Qualifications Policies and formatting	Public	Kerry Ore

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

1.1 Smart Awards is committed to ensuring that all individuals have fair, transparent and inclusive access to its qualifications, apprenticeship assessments and End-Point Assessments (EPA). Fair access means that no person is denied the opportunity to participate, learn, develop or be assessed because of barriers that could reasonably be removed. Fair access also means that decisions relating to assessment, progression or certification are made solely on the basis of evidence and competence, without bias or discrimination.

1.2 Smart Awards recognises that individuals may face barriers arising from disability, health conditions, language, socioeconomic factors, digital access, personal circumstances or organisation-level practices. This policy ensures those barriers are identified early, addressed appropriately and minimised wherever possible, whilst ensuring that the integrity and validity of assessments remain uncompromised.

1.3 Smart Awards requires all Centres, Employers, Training Providers, Assessors, Internal Quality Assurers, Independent End-Point Assessors (IEPAs), NOPS users, contractors and staff to uphold this policy in full. Every individual must be treated with dignity, fairness and respect throughout their engagement with Smart Awards, whether through registration, learning, assessment, EPA, appeals or certification.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

2.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide a clear and consistent approach to ensuring individuals can fully access Smart Awards qualifications, apprenticeship assessments and EPA services, without unfair disadvantage or discrimination. Fair access is fundamental to maintaining confidence in the integrity and value of Smart Awards' provision and ensures compliance with the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty, Ofqual regulatory requirements and SQA Accreditation Principles.

2.2 This policy sets out:

- How Smart Awards ensures individuals can access qualification and EPA processes fairly.
- How barriers to participation are identified, assessed and removed where appropriate.
- Expectations placed on Centres, Employers, Training Providers, Assessors and IEPAs.
- The principles that underpin fair access, including transparency, inclusivity and consistency.
- Arrangements for reasonable adjustments and special consideration.
- How individuals can raise concerns relating to access, fairness or discriminatory practice.
- How Smart Awards monitors and reviews access arrangements.

2.3 This policy applies to:

- All qualifications regulated by Smart Awards
- Apprenticeship on-programme assessments
- End-Point Assessments
- All staff, assessors, IEPAs, IQAs, EQAs and contractors
- All Centres, Employers and Training Providers
- All learners, apprentices and assessment participants

It applies to all stages of engagement, from initial enquiry through to certification.

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 Fair Access

Fair access refers to the principle that all individuals should have an equal opportunity to participate in qualifications and assessments. This includes ensuring that policies, systems, procedures and practices do not create disadvantage, whether intentional or unintentional.

3.2 Barriers to Access

Barriers can arise from a wide range of factors, including disability, health conditions, language, literacy, digital access, location, socioeconomic circumstances or procedural requirements. Smart Awards works to identify and reduce such barriers wherever reasonably possible.

3.3 Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable adjustments are changes to assessment arrangements designed to remove or minimise disadvantage for individuals with disabilities or long-term health conditions. Adjustments must not compromise competence standards, the independence of EPA decision-making or the validity, reliability or fairness of assessment outcomes.

3.4 Special Consideration

Special consideration refers to a post-assessment adjustment to reflect a temporary or unforeseen circumstance that significantly impacted an individual's performance. Special consideration cannot compensate for a lack of competence.

4. PRINCIPLES OF FAIR ACCESS

Smart Awards follows a set of core principles to ensure fair access across all qualifications and EPA activity.

4.1 Inclusivity and Transparency

Smart Awards aims to make all information, documentation and processes open, accessible and transparent. Individuals must understand what is required of them at every stage of the assessment journey. Centres and Providers must ensure all individuals are fully informed about assessment expectations, reasonable adjustments, timelines and available support.

4.2 Removing Barriers

Fair access requires that barriers which could prevent individuals from accessing assessments are identified and minimised. Smart Awards evaluates its processes, systems, documentation, digital platforms and delivery arrangements to ensure no unnecessary restrictions are placed upon individuals.

4.3 Fair and Consistent Assessment

All assessment decisions must be made objectively and consistently. IEPAs and Assessors must ensure that performance is judged solely on evidence of competence. No assessment decision may be influenced by an individual's protected characteristics, background or personal circumstances.

4.4 Accessible Information

Smart Awards ensures that key information relating to qualifications, assessments, EPA and reasonable adjustment procedures is provided in clear, accessible language, free from jargon. Documentation is reviewed regularly to maintain accessibility and clarity.

4.5 Respect and Professional Conduct

Individuals must be treated with respect and dignity at all times. Centres and Providers must maintain environments where individuals feel safe, valued and supported, and where discriminatory behaviour is challenged promptly.

4.6 Maintaining Assessment Integrity

Fair access must always support, not compromise, assessment integrity. Reasonable adjustments must not change assessment requirements or lower standards. For EPA, adjustments must not compromise independence or conflict with Assessment Plan rules.

5. RESPONSIBILITIES

5.1 Smart Awards Board/CEO

The Board and CEO ensures that fair access is embedded within strategic planning and governance. The Board reviews access-related data and ensures that policy, training and resources support inclusive participation.

5.2 The Responsible Officer

The Responsible Officer is responsible for ensuring that all Smart Awards operations support fair access. This includes identifying organisational risks, implementing corrective actions and supporting staff and partners to apply policy requirements consistently.

5.3 Quality & Compliance Manager

Responsible for ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements and overseeing the effective administration of reasonable adjustments and special consideration. The role includes monitoring trends, analysing access-related data and supporting quality assurance processes.

5.4 Centres, Employers and Training Providers

Centres and Providers must take proactive responsibility for supporting fair access. This includes early identification of support needs, clear communication with individuals, and ensuring that internal delivery and assessment arrangements uphold Smart Awards' expectations.

5.5 Assessors, IQAs, EQAs and IEPAs

Assessment staff must apply criteria consistently and without bias. They must recognise where individuals may require support and signpost adjustment procedures. IEPAs must remain independent and ensure that EPA decisions are free from influence.

5.6 Learners and Apprentices

Individuals must participate responsibly, communicate their needs openly and engage with the support available. They must raise concerns about access or fairness in a timely manner.

6. FAIR ACCESS THROUGHOUT THE ASSESSMENT JOURNEY

6.1 Registration and Pre-Assessment

Centres and Providers must ensure that registration processes are fair, transparent and accessible. Information provided at this stage must allow individuals to understand:

- Entry requirements
- Assessment formats
- EPA expectations (where applicable)
- Options for support and adjustments

6.2 Learning and On-Programme Assessment

Fair access requires that learning environments are inclusive and supportive. Providers must ensure that individuals can participate fully and that any emerging needs are identified early.

6.3 Preparing for EPA and Final Assessment

Fair access during EPA preparation includes:

- Providing clear, accessible information about EPA structure
- Supporting individuals to understand requirements
- Ensuring Gateway requirements do not disadvantage individuals
- Setting out assessment arrangements clearly well in advance

6.4 Assessment Delivery

Assessments must be delivered in environments that support fairness, including:

- Accessible venues and platforms
- Clear instructions
- Consistent application of criteria
- Professional, unbiased behaviour from all assessors and staff

6.5 Certification

Certification decisions are based solely on valid assessment outcomes. Fair access includes ensuring no individual is disadvantaged by administrative processes or delays.

7. REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS AND SPECIAL CONSIDERATION

7.1 Smart Awards ensures that individuals who meet the criteria for adjustments or special consideration are supported appropriately. Applications must be evidence-based and processed in a fair, timely and consistent manner.

7.2 Adjustments must never compromise assessment integrity or alter the competence standard. EPA adjustments must meet Assessment Plan requirements and must not compromise independence.

7.3 Special consideration may be applied where temporary circumstances affect performance; however, competence must still be demonstrated.

8. RAISING CONCERNS ABOUT FAIR ACCESS

8.1 Individuals have the right to raise concerns regarding accessibility, fairness or potential discriminatory practice. Concerns may be raised through:

- The Smart Awards Complaints Policy
- The Appeals Policy (for assessment decisions)
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Direct communication with Smart Awards

8.2 Smart Awards investigates concerns promptly, impartially and confidentially and ensures that individuals are not disadvantaged for raising an issue.

9. MONITORING AND REVIEW

9.1 Smart Awards monitors access arrangements across qualifications, apprenticeship assessments and EPA, including trends in:

- Requests for adjustments
- Special consideration applications
- Complaints relating to access
- Assessment outcomes across groups
- Barriers identified through Centre or Provider activity
- Digital or system accessibility issues

9.2 Monitoring informs organisational improvement. This policy is reviewed annually or earlier where regulatory, legal or operational changes require.

10. REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

10.1. This policy is reviewed and revised annually in response to feedback, changes in legislation and guidance from the regulators, Qualifications Scotland Accreditation or Ofqual.

11. OFQUAL GENERAL CONDITIONS

11.1.D2.2: An awarding organisation must monitor qualifications which it makes available for any feature which could disadvantage a group of Learners who share a particular Characteristic.

11.2.D2.3: Where an awarding organisation has identified such a feature, it must – (a) remove any disadvantage which is unjustifiable, and (b) maintain a record of any disadvantage which it believes to be justifiable, setting out the reasons why in its opinion the disadvantage is justifiable.

12. QUALIFICATION SCOTLAND ACCREDITATION PRINCIPLES

12.1. Principle 3. The awarding body must have the necessary resources to effectively carry out their operational functions to meet regulatory requirements.

12.2. Principle 12. The awarding body and its providers must ensure that they have the necessary arrangements and resources required to manage and administer qualification delivery and assessment.

12.2. Principle 14. The awarding body shall ensure that its qualifications and their delivery and assessment are fair, inclusive and accessible to learners.