

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT (EQIA)

Quality Assurance Schemes Retiral

Project Lead	Head of Industry Development
Sponsor (if relevant)	Director of Industry & Destination Development
Department & Directorate	Industry & Destination Development (IDD)

Project overview and context:

The updated VisitScotland Strategic Framework outlines its core purpose as driving the visitor economy, growing its value to Scotland.

VisitScotland has carried out a review of its Quality Assurance Schemes, taking into account changing consumer behaviour and the needs of businesses.

VisitScotland's Quality Assurance Scheme has been in place since 1985. The fee-based Scheme has evolved and changed over that time to include things such as visitor welcome, sustainability, accessibility as well as investment and marketing advice. However, the criteria for assessment for the Scheme has largely been based on visitor facilities identified through a set of Common Standards. As an example, QA Assessors assess the following areas during their visits: cleanliness, hospitality and friendliness, service and efficiency, appearance and maintenance of the property / grounds, quality and maintenance of public areas and the food offering. Accommodation businesses and attractions are graded one to five stars through a process of visits and the report produced contains advice and recommendations.

The Quality Assurance Scheme has not been used by VisitScotland as a way of assessing accommodation businesses and attractions in relation to equality considerations. Instead, VisitScotland offers advice and support in relation to accessibility, inclusion and other considerations for businesses through its Responsible Tourism Team. The advice and support which is offered by VisitScotland in this area is not changing. Indeed, VisitScotland is

currently working with AccessAble, an external provider which provides accessibility information and guides for businesses across Scotland and the UK. This work with AccessAble is designed to support businesses to create accessibility guides.

The VisitScotland Board has agreed that to deliver on its core purpose, reach more businesses with quality advice and meet the needs of the different sectors of the industry with a more tailored approach to drive business growth and performance, advice should be free to access and delivered through an engagement programme. This means that VisitScotland will be able to reach more businesses to offer advice and support than only those who were part of the Quality Assurance Scheme. Therefore, it will retire its Quality Assurance schemes and develop a new programme of business advice and support that will be digital-first but not digital-only, with one-to-one advice available where required. Through the provision of quality information, VisitScotland's new business support programme also aims to increase the number of businesses developing access statements to make it easier for visitors with protected characteristics to plan where they will stay and what they will do

Which users are in the scope of this Project?

Type of user	Delete as appropriate	Additional information about the users
Business customers	YES	Tourism & Events Businesses / Existing QA participants
Members of the public/visitors	YES	
Employees	YES	

Gathering Evidence and Stakeholder Engagement

A number of information sources were used to inform the decision to retire our Quality Assurance Scheme:

- Participation trends in Quality Assurance Schemes. Participation in our Quality Assurance Scheme has been declining year on year. End of financial year 2022/23 on 31 March 2023 - 27.9% down across all schemes since 2019. [island-communities-impact-statement-quality-assurance-decision.pdf](#)
- An independent survey carried out by external company Modern Human with businesses using our corporate website to look for support and advice.
- A survey of Quality Assurance participants to determine the value of the scheme to their business.

Stakeholder Engagement

Engagement has taken place with a range of regional and national stakeholders* to present our findings and outline the principles of our new delivery model. Discussions have been constructive and partners have recognised the opportunity to work closer on delivering advice to the industry that supports our collective ambitions to grow the value of the visitor economy, helping businesses to grow and develop to meet the expectations of future visitors.

*(*The STA Council (representing a wide range of sector and destination organisations), ASVA, ASSC, Scottish Agritourism and Scotland's Bed and Breakfast Association)*

Stakeholder feedback can be summarised as follows:

- Businesses are looking for a broader range of advice to include market insight and trends, information on relevant legislation, advice related to digital marketing and digital channel development and sustainability as the most valuable subject matters.
- Quality Assurance is not seen as a driver of bookings and can focus on areas that do not necessarily matter to the visitor; criteria does not capture the overall visitor experience.
- The criteria lacks flexibility to allow for more diverse businesses and there are restrictions on the level of star rating a business can achieve.
- There is a desire from industry that they are involved in the evolution of quality; they are not fixed on it taking the form of a scheme. Businesses valued elements of the advice they received through the scheme and would like to see relevant advice re-purposed in any new model which will continue to be sector specific.

In summary, our analysis concluded that:

- Quality advice is core to our remit to deliver sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and provision of this should be free and integral to our core purpose. A broader definition of quality has been agreed to help shape our new advice programme and achieve the ambitions of the national tourism strategy Scotland Outlook 2030.
- The current Quality Assurance Scheme is based on Common Standards (quality assessment criteria set by the National Tourist Boards and adopted by the AA), which has not evolved to reflect new tourism experiences, and can be overly restrictive in grading quality experiences. Quality should be considered in the context of what is feasible for a tourism business.
- A digital-first, but not digital-only, approach to delivering advice will ensure we can reach more businesses. This will include delivering advice through webinars and workshops, working in partnership with destination and sector organisations.
- We have a greater and more impactful role to play in the continual development of quality visitor experiences through a re-developed advice programme designed to reach more businesses, rather than 'assuring' quality of an experience.
- Our approach to inclusive tourism will not change but it is expected that more businesses will be reached by changing the way in which we provide advice and support about quality.

Furthermore, we do not believe that retiring our Quality Assurance Scheme will result in a market failure: private sector organisations such as the AA and Quality in Tourism operate in this field under the same Common Standards.

Will the project deny access to people with any protected characteristic defined by the Equality Act 2010 or affect their opportunity to benefit from/participate in the project?

We do not anticipate a specific impact from this activity on people with any protected characteristic defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Summary table

Protected characteristic	Is there a potential for positive or negative impact?	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	Action to address negative impact
Age	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to age from this activity.	<p>We'll focus on the year-round delivery of a programme of information and insight to help businesses develop the visitor experience and respond to the changing needs of visitors.</p> <p>QA member research (September 2023) showed the VisitScotland support they most valued was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advice on legislation relevant to their business • consumer insight and trends • sustainability and digital advice <p>This advice and support will continue to be available. We'll simply deliver more of the programme through a digital-first, but not digital-only, approach. This approach will ensure we have maximum reach and can also signpost to the wider support services and products of our national business support partners, with the ability to provide one-to-one support when it's needed most.</p>	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A

		<p>We will also work closely with destination and sector partners to tailor advice to local and sector needs.</p> <p>Digital content will meet accessibility standards.</p> <p>From a visitor perspective, we will continue our work in relation to inclusive tourism. We are already working with AccessAble who provide accessibility information and guides about businesses across Scotland and the UK.</p>		
Disability	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to disability from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Sex	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to sex from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Ethnicity	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to ethnicity from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Religion/Belief/ Non-belief	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to religion/belief/non-belief from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Sexual Orientation	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to sexual orientation from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A

Transgender	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to gender/transgender from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Pregnancy/Maternity	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to pregnancy and maternity from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A
Marriage and Civil Partnership	We do not anticipate a specific impact on people in relation to marriage and civil partnership from this activity.	As above	No negative impact is perceived.	N/A

It is not expected that the removal of our Quality Assurance schemes with face-to-face visits will specifically impact groups with protected characteristics. Provision of quality and business advice will be delivered in a different manner going forward and it will be designed to be as accessible as possible for all users (i.e. help businesses become more accessible and help visitors find accommodation, attractions and facilities which are accessible for their requirements). This will include a digital-first, but not digital-only, programme of business advice which will allow for one-to-one support where it's required. We will flag alternative privately-run and internationally recognised Quality Assurance schemes that businesses can choose to purchase.

We will continue to work with industry partners and businesses to develop accessible guides. This will support businesses which deliver information services, to help them improve their accessibility. [Accessible & Inclusive Tourism | VisitScotland.org](https://www.visitScotland.org)

Internal VisitScotland staff

We acknowledge that the changes being delivered will result in VisitScotland staff having to understand the overall impact of change, for example, processing announcements and recognising what it means for them, such as financial and career impacts. For some staff, redeployment and re-skilling will be required.

We recognise the significant impact change has on all affected staff, however, HR processes and policies related to the change programme are inclusive and do not discriminate against any specific groups or individual member of staff. We will offer support to staff and will make, in line with our equality duties, any reasonable alternatives that may support staff.

Outline the actions you will undertake to change or mitigate the impact.

We do not anticipate a specific impact from this activity on people with a protected characteristic defined by the Equality Act 2010. Having considered the potential or actual impacts, we have decided to continue our work to retire our Quality Assurance Programme and consider that no changes or mitigation to the proposed activity is required. Our new approach will be more inclusive, designed to reach more businesses with online and in person advice.

Results from your engagement/action undertaken.

Where appropriate, and helpful, there are a number of internal staff groups who can be consulted on how changes may impact staff, including our Staff Consultation Group. This is made up of representatives from across the business and provides feedback and consultation on a range of organisational and operational matters. In addition, a staff engagement group has been established specifically for directly impacted staff. This group provides staff from impacted teams with a regular, structured forum where they are updated on the changes and progress relating to the development of the refreshed business support programme, giving them the opportunity to raise any matters of importance.

We will add any significant points from stakeholder engagement activity where it is relevant to this document.