



Social Security Scotland  
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

# Equality strategy

2021–2022



Dignity,  
fairness,  
respect.

# Contents

Glossary	3
Introduction	6
Equality outcomes	8
Purpose	9
Commitments	9
Putting this strategy in place	11
Equality impact assessments	12
Evaluation	12
Equalities action plan	13

## Glossary

- **Agency Leadership Team** – Senior colleagues within Social Security Scotland and the initial level of our governance structure.
- **Care experience** – This term covers anyone who currently is or who has ever been looked after, no matter for how short a time or if the setting was at home or away from home in kinship care, residential, foster or secure care. There is no age limit and it includes care leavers and adopted children who were previously looked after.
- **Community benefits (under procurement)** – ‘Community benefits’ in this context are contractual requirements which deliver a wider social benefit as well as the main purpose of the contract (in particular, requirements relating to targeted training and employment outcomes).
- **Discrimination** – The unfair or harmful treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age or sex.
- **Diversity** – The understanding that each person is unique and that we recognise our differences. These differences can be to do with race, ethnic background, gender, sexual preference, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, or religious, political or other beliefs.
- **Equality** – The right of people with different characteristics and backgrounds to have the same rights, social status, and access to the same opportunities.
- **[Executive Advisory Body](#)** – This group is chaired by our Chief Executive and provides advice. It is made up of our Executive Team and non-executive members. The non-executive members offer constructive challenge and advice to the Chief Executive on our strategy and effective governance.
- **[Executive Team](#)** – Our Executive Team set our strategic direction and make sure that we meet our objectives. They consider and approve all our organisation’s policies, plans and processes. They also consider decisions from the Scottish Government and consider how they might affect our staffing, finance and levels of client service.
- **Human rights** – Basic rights that every person has. These include, but are not limited to, the right to life, the right to freedom of religion and belief and the right to a fair trial.
- **Equality Act 2010** – Protects people from being treated unfairly because of who they are, including because of their age, religion or sex.
- **Equality impact assessment** – A testing process that assesses policies and proposals on how they will affect people with protected characteristics once put in place. Assessments aim to prevent discrimination and identify opportunities to promote equality.
- **Inclusive communication** – An approach to all communication that means the largest number of people can take part, and people receive information and can express themselves in ways that they find easiest.
- **Local delivery** – our staff teams, based in each of Scotland’s 32 local authority areas.
- **Mainstreaming equality** – A long-term, strategic approach to making sure that equality, diversity and inclusion are at the heart of an organisation’s culture and operations. Mainstreaming is an effective way of making sure that the whole institution is meeting its public-sector equality duty. In Scotland, there is a specific duty within the legislation for public authorities to mainstream equality across their activities.

- **Intersectionality** - This term comes from the American word intersection, meaning a place where many roads meet. Intersectionality places individuals at the centre of this junction, with each road representing a different form of discrimination. The experience of sexism for a black woman is different from a white woman, and how black men experience racism is different to that of black women. Instead of seeing categories of social difference as separate, intersectionality shows us how these many dimensions of our social identities meet, to form a person's unique experience of privilege or discrimination.
- **National Performance Framework** –This framework measures Scotland's progress against the National Outcomes. To do this, it uses 'national indicators'. These indicators give a measure of national wellbeing. They include a range of economic, social and environmental indicators.
- **Non-executive members** – Our non-executive members sit on our Executive Advisory Body. They are recruited from members of the public and offer constructive challenge and advice to the Chief Executive of Social Security Scotland.
- **Policy** – A set of ideas or plans used as a basis for making decisions. An official organisation's policy on a particular issue is their attitude and actions regarding that issue.
- **Poverty** – Not having access to enough income for a person's basic needs. This means being unable to pay for food, drinking water, shelter, toiletries and other essential resources.
- **Procurement** – Sourcing and buying goods and services for business use from an outside source. Procurement is usually guided by a specific policy and process.
- **Public-sector equality duty** – Sometimes referred to as the general duty in the Equality Act 2010. This duty means Scottish public authorities must have 'due regard' to the need to:
  - eliminate unlawful discrimination;
  - advance equal opportunities; and
  - foster good relations.

In 2012 Scottish Ministers made regulations that placed specific duties on Scottish public bodies to help them meet the general duty. These are also known as the [Scottish Specific Duties](#).

- **Protected characteristics** – With the Equality Act there are nine protected characteristics. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their age, race, gender reassignment, disability, sex, sexual orientation, religion or belief, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity. For the purposes of our [equality strategy](#) and our equality impact assessments we have added care experience as a 10th protected characteristic.
- **Public consultation** – involves the public in providing their views and feedback on a proposal for us to consider.

- **Reasonable adjustments** – We have a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to put in place reasonable adjustments in the workplace where disabled staff would otherwise be put at a substantial disadvantage compared with non-disabled colleagues. Employers cannot legally justify failing to keep to a duty to make a reasonable adjustment. Employers must take appropriate steps to removing, reducing or preventing any barriers that may negatively affect disabled colleagues and job applicants.
- **Reasonable Adjustment Passport** – A document, often electronic, which allows people to easily record information about their condition, any reasonable adjustments they may have in place and any difficulties they face. The passport helps to make sure there is a clear record and can be used with new line managers to explain what is needed in the workplace to help them carry out their role.
- **Rights-based** – Using accepted human-rights standards and principles when designing, putting in place, monitoring and evaluating related policies and programmes. The principle of equality and freedom from discrimination is central to a rights-based service, including discrimination based on sex and gender roles.
- **Scottish Government Fair Start Scotland** – This is the employability support service [Fair Start Scotland](#) , launched in April 2018. Those taking part are entitled to up to 18 months’ pre-employment support and a further 12 months in-work support.
- **Scottish Government** – The devolved government of Scotland. The government is led by the First Minister, who selects the cabinet secretaries, who attend cabinet, and the Ministers with the approval of Parliament. Government Ministers all sit in Parliament and are accountable to it.
- **Scottish Government’s Social Security Directorate** - Work with the Department for Work and Pensions to make sure social security powers from the UK Government are safely and securely transferred, under the Scotland Act 2016. They are responsible for developing the necessary policies and legislation and establishing a social security agency to deliver the devolved benefits. They also work with the Department for Work and Pensions on the benefits that the United Kingdom Government keep responsibility for.
- **Social Impact Pledge** – The [Social Impact Pledge](#) initiative asks public-sector organisations across Scotland to increase their social impact by making a public commitment to changing three aspects of their current operations or policies. ‘Social impact’ is the effect an action, activity, project, programme or policy has on people and communities.
- **Social Security Scotland Act 2018** – Allows the Scottish Government to establish a new social security system better targeted at Scotland and which has dignity, fairness and respect at the heart of everything we do.
- **Stakeholders** – A person or organisation with an interest or concern in the activity of an organisation.
- **Trauma-informed approach** –An approach to delivering our service that is based on knowledge and understanding of how trauma (anything that is deeply distressing or disturbing) affects people's lives, how they use a service and what they need from that service. The main aim of this approach is to raise awareness among all staff about the wide impact of trauma and to prevent traumatising clients again in service settings.

## Introduction

Mainstreaming (thinking about and applying equality to our daily work and the decisions we make) is at the heart of our organisation and how we continue to develop. This [Equality Strategy](#) is one of three linked documents that explain our approach. The other two documents are our [Mainstreaming Equality Progress Report](#) and our [Equality Outcomes](#).

We deliver social security in partnership with the Social Security Directorate in Scottish Government. It is important to understand this as it puts into context our progress and the work we will do in the future to apply equality in everything we do.

### Social Security Scotland

On 1 September 2018, we were formed as an executive agency.

We deliver the following benefits.

- Best Start Grant Pregnancy and Baby Payment
- Best Start Grant Early Learning Payment
- Best Start Grant School Age Payment
- Best Start Foods
- Carer's Allowance Supplement
- Funeral Support Payment
- Job Start Payment
- Young Carer Grant
- Child Winter Heating Assistance
- Scottish Child Payment

### Social Security Directorate Programme

The Scottish Government's Social Security Directorate Programme helps get benefits ready for us to deliver. The programme is part of the Scottish Government and has its own management and structure. It is responsible for managing when benefits will be introduced.

## Working together

We and the Social Security Directorate Programme work closely together to provide a high standard of service and put equality at the heart of how we work. We also share some services and systems with the Scottish Government, which may at times affect the nature or speed of change. We will explain this further in our action plan and [Equality Outcomes](#) document.

## Legislation

We have developed this [Equality Strategy](#) in line with the principles of section 1 of the [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#). These principles of dignity, fairness and respect are intended to provide us with a supportive, rights-based culture. They are deliberately in line with the fundamental right to social security, as set out in key human-rights documents and United Nations guidance. Together, these principles form the basis of a system which has the values of equality and diversity at its heart.

These principles guide how we work. They influence our approach to our day-to-day activities, planning our workforce, our organisational strategy, our commitment to keep improving, and data protection.

As a service provider and an employer we have responsibilities under the [Equality Act 2010](#).

## Procurement (sourcing and buying goods and services)

We will carry out an equality impact assessment to guide the procurement strategy for contracts with a value of more than £50,000 (not including VAT). Also, we will make sure that reducing inequality is a priority when procuring community benefits under section 25 of the [Procurement Reform \(Scotland\) Act](#). Where we want to create jobs through community benefits, we will encourage suppliers to recruit from the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 15% most deprived areas or those taking part in the Scottish Government Fair Start Scotland employability programme.

## Related strategies and plans

Putting our [Equality Strategy](#) in place is not the only way we will show how we mainstream equality – we have a number of other related strategies and action plans to support our overall approach.

These include the following.

- Corporate Plan
- Our Charter
- Charter Measurement Framework
- People Strategy

Our strategies support our workforce and our stakeholders to work together for the greatest effect. We aim to use these strategies to challenge ourselves about what we are doing, to review how we are doing it, and to identify whether we can do more.

Our approach will be in line with that of the Scottish Government, in particular the work of the new Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights Directorate. This [Equality Strategy](#), and the actions to support our [equality outcomes](#), also incorporates details of our existing work, which is set out in Scottish Government plans. These plans include the current [Race Equality Action Plan](#), [the Gypsy and Traveller Action Plan](#), [A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People: Employment Action Plan](#) and the [Gender Pay Gap Action Plan](#).

### Developing our Equality Strategy

This strategy has been guided by extensive consultation, including:

- an online consultation held between November 2019 and February 2020;
- nine workshops with the public and stakeholders;
- three staff events; and
- discussions with our Internal and External Equalities Networks.

## Equality outcomes

Three [equality outcomes](#) will support how we put this strategy into practice. Each outcome consists of a broad statement and a specific focus for 2021 to 2022. For more detailed information, please see the [Equality Outcomes](#) document.

### Outcome one – Our workforce

Our workforce will be as diverse as the people who are entitled to our service.

We particularly want to increase the number of employees who are disabled or from ethnic minority backgrounds. We aim to do this by ‘narrowing the gap’ in the recruitment process from application to job offer for people from an ethnic minority or disabled candidates compared with people who are white or who are not disabled.

### Outcome two – Our culture

We will encourage our staff to listen and respond and to be inclusive. We will increase the diversity of our workforce at decision-making and management levels. In particular, we will support people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people who are disabled to move on to more senior levels.

### Outcome three – Delivering and improving our service

We will learn from people entitled to our service and those organisations who provide support and advocacy (representation), in order to increase the number of people who use our service and improve how we deliver our service to all those who are eligible for benefits.

This includes people who:

- currently use our service;
- may use it in the future; and
- are eligible for our services but are not currently using them.

In particular, we want to increase awareness and uptake of benefits from people from ethnic minority communities, people who communicate in different ways and people with care experience.



## Purpose

Our purpose is to manage the Scottish social security system effectively and in line with the principles in the [Social Security \(Scotland\) Act 2018](#) and [Our Charter](#). This also means we have to make sure that the people we serve have a positive experience. In other words, how we do our work is as important as what we do. We are part of the wider Scottish Government, and we work to support them to meet their target of the National Performance Framework. The work that we will do over the next two years will contribute to the wider outcomes of:

- [human rights](#) – we will treat people with dignity, fairness and respect and provide a high-quality service to our clients; and
- poverty – we will contribute to tackling poverty in Scotland.

## Commitments

Our [Equality Strategy](#) provides a comprehensive plan to mainstream equalities across our organisation. To put this strategy in place we have to work together with our workforce, and have effective relationships with our stakeholders, trade unions and our current and potential clients. This duty to foster good relations was evident throughout our public consultation and the actions that resulted from the feedback we received.

Delivering our [Equality Strategy](#) depends on the following three commitments that will support our approach.

- 1 Evidence base** – using the information we collect about our clients and workforce to support the actions we take and measuring progress using the evidence available
- 2 Framework for practice** – bringing together practices that support the knowledge, skills, behaviours and attitudes we expect from our people
- 3 Intersectionality** – developing our understanding of intersectionality in our data gathering, analysis and decision making.

### Evidence base

As a new public body we are still developing our evidence and our understanding of what we need to do to mainstream equality. We work closely with our social researchers, statisticians and analysts and the Scottish Government to achieve this aim.

## Framework for practice

This framework brings together a number of existing and developing practices. These support:

- how we behave as an employer;
- the behaviours, attitudes, skills and knowledge we expect from our workforce, suppliers and contractors; and
- how we will continue to develop and deliver our service.



This includes:

- **inclusive communication**;
- a trauma-informed approach;
- **intelligent kindness**; and
- lived experience – a commitment to listening to and learning from the first-hand experience of our workforce, clients and potential clients.

Together, the action we need to take to establish these practices will allow us to see how we operate as an organisation that is led by our values. These practices link with commitments made in the Social Security Charter and the Charter Measurement Framework.

## Intersectionality

The interconnected nature of the different protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, and sex) can create further opportunities for discrimination and disadvantage. The particular discrimination a person experiences because of connected characteristics or aspects of their identity is an area we need to better understand. Improving awareness of this and its effect on decisions we make as an employer and service provider will help us to better achieve our [equality outcomes](#).

Our Internal Equalities Network is working to improve our understanding of intersectionality and what we need to do to establish this in how we develop and deliver our services and how we are as an employer.

## Putting this strategy in place

Each one of us at Social Security Scotland has an individual duty and a shared duty to make sure we are committed to dealing with discrimination and unfairness and to promoting equality and diversity in our daily work. We must all be aware of our responsibilities and be able to show how we promote equality through our work.

Our Strategy and Client Experience Division leads on this work and supports colleagues across the organisation.

Two equality networks have helped to guide our approach and supported our improved understanding of equality. The Internal Network has developed an action plan to look at priority areas, and the External Network has reviewed our equality impact assessments and how we currently present and report on equality information.

The [External Equalities Network](#) has representatives from 19 stakeholder organisations. The Internal Equalities Network has 23 members of staff from across Social Security Scotland. The staff members come from across Scotland, have different job roles and bring first-hand experience of equality issues and their effect.

We will continue to help develop the members of our Internal Equalities Network and listen to our External Network colleagues to provide appropriate support when necessary.

How we put this strategy into practice will be set out in the [Equality Outcomes](#) Action Plan and managed by the Internal Equalities Network.

## Equality impact assessments

Under equality law, we have to assess the impact (effect) of all our activities, and this is one way we can show we are meeting the general equality duty.

Assessing the likely or expected impact of our activities can improve how we develop our policy and deliver services. We use this process to show how we consider the needs of our workforce and the communities we serve. We can then identify how to advance equality, foster good relations and not discriminate unlawfully.

Not all groups of people that will be affected by our work are covered by the current protected characteristics. As we state in our [Corporate Parenting Plan](#), we have added people with care experience to the list of protected characteristics that we consider when assessing the effect of our decisions as part of equality impact assessments

We have developed guidance to support impact assessments and are running introductory and assessment workshops for staff. These will help develop best practice and the joint responsibility that is needed to make sure the effect our work has on all equality groups is understood and dealt with.

All reports to our Agency Leadership Team, Executive Team and Executive Advisory Body have to set out the equality impact assessment process we have followed. We also give a summary of every equality impact assessment record to our External Equalities Network for them to comment on.

We have also carried out an equality impact assessment and Island Communities impact assessment while developing this strategy.

## Evaluation

We will work with our colleagues and those at Scottish Government to assess the effect of our strategy. We will also work with our analyst colleagues to develop an appropriate evaluation process.

We will review our mainstreaming [equality outcomes](#) each year. We will report on the progress of this strategy and the outcomes every year to our Executive Advisory Body.

## Equalities action plan

We have developed an action plan to put this strategy in place and achieve our [equality outcomes](#). Our Internal Equality Network will co-ordinate and monitor this plan, but everyone is responsible for putting it into practice. They will update their action plan every month and report every six months to network meetings. Below is a summary of work in progress relating to each of the three outcomes.

Key:

- Action – the activity we will carry out
- Priority for completing this activity.
  - Short** = by end June 2021
  - Medium** = by end September 2021
  - Long** = by end March 2022

Outcome 1	
Action	Priority
We will analyse the differences for specific protected characteristics (initially race and disability) that exist for each stage of the recruitment process to better focus our actions.	Long
We will analyse responses to disability questions asked during the recruitment process to understand the effect of adjustments to the workplace.	Short
We will review recommendations from the Scottish Government Reasonable Adjustment Project Team, to cover new employees and people changing posts within Social Security Scotland. This work will include asking people what they need to make reasonable adjustments rather than focusing on a specific cause (for example, a medical condition) and expanding the use of the Reasonable Adjustment Passport.	Medium
We will increase understanding of the Reasonable Adjustment Process through workshops and guidance.	Short
We will put in place and build on the recommendations of the <a href="#">Scottish Government_Race Recruitment and Retention Action Plan</a> to help develop our Diversity Plan.	Medium
We will review the language, images and methods we use when recruiting and make sure we maintain a range of ways to apply for jobs.	Medium
We will continue to deliver, with our stakeholders, workshops for candidates to help people understand our application and interview process.	Medium
We will increase the diversity of our non-executive members.	Short

Outcome 2	
Action	Priority
We will put in place action to increase the number of complete responses from staff on our internal database (where we record information about staff diversity), particularly to reduce the number of 'Unknowns' for disability, race and sex	Short
We will carry out an equality analysis of staff working their probation period, retaining staff, learning and development, appraisal and promotion (temporary and permanent) information by gender, disability, ethnicity and grade.	Long
We will set baseline information on gender, race and disability pay gaps.	Long
We will continue to work with our stakeholders to develop our learning and development programmes in order to make sure our workforce understand the lives of people eligible for the benefits available.	Long
We will carry out more workshops and update guidance to help increase the understanding of equality impact assessments.	Short
We will trial the role of Fairness Advocates to offer support to victims of bullying, harassment and discrimination.	Medium

## Outcome 3

Action	Priority
We will carry out more analysis of clients' diversity and equalities information, in particular the disabled people category and intersectionality.	Medium
We will build on the work of the National Engagement and Local Delivery teams to understand the needs of specific equality groups and communities. This includes demand for translated information, making our application process easier, and specific support needs.	Long
We will be aware of and understand the findings from client panels, experience panels and equalities research when we are developing and improving our services.	Long
In line with our commitment under the Social Impact Pledge, we will encourage everyone to use their allocated volunteering hours. This will help to increase awareness of the differing needs and the specific inequalities faced by our current and potential clients.	Long
We will improve joint working with our Policy and Directorate colleagues, particularly in relation to the Maximising Benefit Uptake Strategy and Policy Evaluation Strategy for Benefits.	Long