Social Security Scotland
Tèarainteachd Shòisealta Alba

Mainstreaming Equality Report 2025

Dignity, fairness, respect.

Contents

Glossary

Allyship – Actively supporting and standing up for people from underrepresented or marginalised groups.

Assistive technology - Refers to devices or software designed to help disabled people perform everyday tasks and improve their quality of life. Examples include screen readers, hearing aids, and mobility aids like wheelchairs.

Discrimination - The unjust, prejudicial or harmful treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, or religious, political or other beliefs.

Diversity - The understanding that everyone is unique and that we recognise and celebrate our differences. These differences include race, ethnic background, gender, sexual orientation, 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.

Equality Act 2010 - Protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. It sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone based on certain protected characteristics, such as age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

Equalities data - Information that is collected about our workforce and our clients. This relates to the protected characteristics and forms of diversity we recognise.

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.

Framework of Practice – This is a tool that includes all practical activities colleagues in Social Security Scotland can use to further the mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality agenda.

Inclusive communication - An approach to all communication that means the largest number of people can take part, people receive information and can express themselves in the ways they find easiest.

Interventions – Priorities, activities or actions that will fulfil a specific purpose.

Mainstream - To make practices and processes part of our daily work.

Mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality - A strategic approach to ensuring that inclusive communication, equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded across as part of an organisation's culture and operations. In Scotland, there is a specific duty within the legislation for public authorities to mainstream equality across their activities.

Mean – This is the average of a set of numbers.

Median – This is the middle value in a set of numbers when they are arranged in order, from smallest to largest.

Policy - A set of ideas or plans used as a basis for making decisions. An organisation's policy on a particular issue is their attitude and actions regarding that issue.

Procurement − Sourcing and buying goods and services for business use from an outside source. Procurement is guided by legislation, policy, and processes.

Protected characteristics − Within the Equality Act there are nine protected characteristics. It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

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 **Public sector equality duty**

Quality Assurance - The process of ensuring that a product or service meets specified standards and requirements throughout its production and delivery.

Scottish Government − The devolved government of Scotland. The government is led by the First Minister, who selects the cabinet secretaries who lead on specific areas including education, health, finance, and social justice. The Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice is responsible for social security. Government Ministers all sit in Parliament and are accountable to it.

Social Security Scotland – an executive agency of the Scottish Government responsible for administering and delivering the social security system in Scotland.

WCAG - The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are technical standards that help make the digital world accessible to disabled people. Numerous stakeholders, including disability advocacy groups, government agencies, and accessibility research organisations, collaborated to create these guidelines, which are considered the universal standard for digital accessibility.

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Message from Chief Executive David Wallace

I am pleased to introduce our Mainstreaming Equality Report 2025.

Within this report, you will read about the progress we have made since we first set equality outcomes in 2021. We also report on progress since our last Mainstreaming Equality Report in 2023 and how we are fulfilling our public sector equality duty.

Our clients are at the heart of everything we do. We committed to delivering a service with human rights and equality at its core, treating everyone with dignity, fairness and respect. This approach underpins our Charter and runs throughout our annual Business Plan and three-year Corporate and People Plans.

This report includes case studies that demonstrate our progress but also how we are continuing to make progress towards becoming an inclusive employer and public service for Scotland's diverse communities.

We now provide vital financial support through 16 payments to around 1.4 million people. As an organisation we have grown in size to make sure we have sufficient resources to deliver these benefits to the people of Scotland.

These values guide our approach to mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality. We remain committed to improving delivery which is why we have also incorporated our inclusive communication principles into our wider equality ambitions.

I hope you enjoy reading this report, which outlines our progress and our future goals in building a truly inclusive organisation delivering a fair and accessible social security system for Scotland.

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Summary

Social Security Scotland's must publish a Mainstreaming Equality Report 2025 every two years. This fulfils a legal requirement in relation to our **public sector equality duty** obligations. The report outlines how we embed equality issues in everything we do and particularly how we are eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and fostering good relations.

In addition to meeting the requirements under the Equality Act 2010, we must also fulfil our legal obligations to communicate in an inclusive and accessible manner. This requirement is outlined in the **Social Security (Scotland) Act 2018**.

Forms of Diversity

We recognise and value diversity and inclusion in our workforce and in how we treat the clients we serve across Scotland. The forms of diversity we actively acknowledge include the nine protected characteristics recognised by the Equality Act 2010. These are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy & Maternity
- Race & Ethnicity
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation
- Marriage or Civil Partnership

Social Security Scotland also acknowledges wider forms of diversity. These are:

- Care Experienced
- Carers
- Children and Young People
- Seldom Heard Groups
- Socio-Economic
- Veterans and Armed Forces

Report Summary

This report is in four parts:

Part 1 reflects on the equality outcomes the organisation set in 2021, and our progress achieved,

Part 2 outlines progress on activities undertaken to mainstream equality throughout the organisation since the last mainstreaming equality report was published in 2023.

Part 3 demonstrates how Social Security Scotland is fulfilling our public sector equality duty in terms of eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and fostering good relations.

Part 4 looks ahead to the setting of new equality outcomes 2025 – 2029. This sets out a plan for how we will continue to fulfil our legal and organisational obligations. These are in relation to equality, diversity, inclusive communication and wider inclusion.

Also included within this report is:

- the organisation's use of Equality Impact Assessments (Case Study 1 on Page 15)
- the organisation's award criteria and conditions relating to public procurement (Case Study 1 on Page 20)
- the organisation's employee diversity information (Annex A)
- the organisation's Gender Pay and Equal Pay Statement Information (Annex B)

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Part 1: Reflecting on Equality Outcomes 2021- 2025

On 18 May 2021, Social Security Scotland published **Equality Outcomes 2021 – 2022**. This committed the organisation to advancing the following three outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Our workforce
- Outcome 2: Our culture
- Outcome 3: Delivering and improving our service

These outcomes were guided by feedback from a **public consultation** held between November 2019 and February 2020. Rocket Science Ltd was commissioned to facilitate the public consultation process and draft these **outcomes**.

Social Security Scotland has reflected on these outcomes and offer the following observations:

We have:

- A workforce that has increased its diversity, in terms of age, ethnicity, disability and minority religions with an almost static workforce in terms of its gender make up.
- Made progress to advancing these outcomes which is demonstrated through the case studies in this section of the report.
- Grown in terms of the number of benefits we deliver, with a corresponding increase in the size of the workforce.
- Focused on a range of activities including equality impact assessments, equality data, internal equalities network, communications, recruitment, organisational development, and national engagement.
- Undertaken an assessment to identify strengths and challenges to inform our continuous improvement and learning processes.
- Taken action to invest resource to develop a package of support for everyone in Social Security Scotland to improve their understanding of expectations and support delivery. This included developing guidance, learning resources, and good practice examples. Creative and innovative methods to communicate, engage and inspire action was also developed. The development phase has just completed with implementation underway.
- Adapted our equality approach so that we now make use of a series of evidence based annual action statements to enable the organisation to adapt to occurring change within a reporting cycle period. We have also agreed an approach to monitoring, assessing, reporting, and explaining our performance and impact in relation to mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality.

We identified that:

- The themes covered in the 2021 outcomes continue to be relevant. They will remain incorporated as part of our new inclusive communication and equality outcomes 2025 – 2029. Although the area of focus will be adapted to reflect the evidence used to develop these new outcomes.
- The organisation continues to experience gaps and challenges with equalities data. Where we can, we have identified where a particular diverse group, or groups may have benefited because of our work. However, we have also been equally clear that gaps remain with our planned and ongoing improvement activity over the next three years addressing these gaps. Social Security Scotland will report on progress in our next mainstreaming report in 2027.

Outcome 1: Our workforce

In 2021, Social Security Scotland set the following outcome:

“Our workforce will be as diverse as the people 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 these backgrounds, compared with people who are white or who are not disabled.”

The following case studies demonstrates our progress towards achieving outcome 1:

Case Study 1: Employee passport to support reasonable adjustments

Social Security Scotland has collaborated with the Scottish Government to embed the use of the employee passport in a way that works within the Agency context. The passport supports all diverse colleagues including those who may live with a disability or health conditions, identify as minority ethnic or with cultural requirements. This can also include colleagues who care for family dependents or be care experienced which may impact their working circumstances.

Participation is voluntary, though completion is encouraged if colleagues feel they require a workplace adjustment to be considered. The passport supports conversations between line managers and colleagues they manage about their individual circumstances. It helps identify where adjustments may be required. It acts as a record of that conversation and includes adjustments agreed as supportive measures.

Positive impacts have been reported by a range of diverse colleagues using the passport. The passport has helped build line manager capability, improve support for colleagues and create an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone can perform at work to their best.

Case Study 2: Recruitment of diversity for the organisation's Executive Advisory Body

The Executive Advisory Body provides oversight of governance and advice to Social Security Scotland. Its membership includes our Executive Team and seven non-executive members.

The non-executive members play an important role in offering constructive challenge and advice to the Chief Executive and wider organisation on our strategy and governance.

Since the last report, the Executive Advisory Body has increased its diverse membership to now include minority ethnic representation.

Outcome 2: Our Culture

In 2021, Social Security Scotland set the following outcome:

"We will take action to encourage an inclusive, listening and responsive culture. We will increase the diversity of our workforce at decision-making and management levels. In particular, we will support people from ethnic minorities and people who are disabled to move on to more senior levels."

The following case studies demonstrates our progress towards achieving outcome 2:

Case Study 1: Encouraging completion of diversity and inclusion data on new Oracle system

With the introduction of our new Oracle human resource system, Social Security Scotland developed a plan to support colleagues through the completion of their diversity and inclusion data. Several group and one-to-one sessions (in person and online) were delivered to help colleagues learn more about the new system and process. The sessions outlined why diversity and inclusion data was required and how the organisation was going to use it.

Colleagues were supported to make an informed choice about sharing their diversity data. There was also increased positive engagement about diversity across the organisation. These actions contributed to Social Security Scotland being enabled to gather, analyse and report on workforce diversity and the gender, race and disability pay gaps as illustrated in the annexes of this report.

Case Study 2: Wellbeing Service and Employee Assistance Programme supporting all colleagues

Social Security Scotland's internal Wellbeing Service and the external Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) provides individual therapy and wellbeing workshops to

colleagues experiencing a range of situations. An Equality Impact Assessment was undertaken when developing the Wellbeing Service. A range of impacts were identified which then informed the design of the service. This included considering accessibility, types of communication support and stakeholder engagement to enable colleagues to be signposted appropriately.

Our Employee Assistance Programme, delivered by HELP Employee Assistance, offers professional support and guidance to Social Security Scotland employees dealing with a variety of emotional, health, and social challenges. Colleagues and their families can access expert-led assistance for issues both at work and at home. Additionally, we ensure that professional support is available from individuals with diverse backgrounds, including those from minority ethnic groups and those living with disabilities.

Outcome 3: Delivering and improving our service

In 2021, Social Security Scotland set the following outcome:

“We will learn from people entitled to our service, and those organisations who provide support and representation, so that we can increase the number of people asking for our services and improve how we deliver them to those who are eligible.

This includes people who:

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

In particular, we will increase awareness among and contact with people from ethnic minority communities, people who communicate in different ways and people with care experience.”

The following case studies demonstrates our progress towards achieving outcome 3:

Case Study 1: Communications Activity

Launched in February 2025, Social Security Scotland’s Carer Support Payment campaign is an example of how we develop our communications activity to ensure it is based on insight from people with lived experience, delivered with a focus on equality and has inclusive communication at its core.

The campaign was based on engagement, research and testing with carers themselves, working in collaboration with the Carers Trust, a trusted stakeholder.

Research told us that people from South-Asian communities are less likely to recognise themselves as carers. We therefore ensured that the advertising featured people from these specific communities, so people could clearly see themselves in the campaign.

Our media channel choices also help ensure we are being inclusive in reaching a range of people and communities. For example, as well as having radio adverts running across national networks and have also paid for slots in ethnic minority stations. To ensure we are reaching a wide geographical area, we also advertise on local stations in a range of rural and island areas.

Ensuring our communications are inclusive is central to our approach. We use Plain English in all channels and our Carer Support Payment factsheet is available in 14 different languages, as well as in Easy Read.

Case Study 2: Using clients' and applicants' equalities data to inform policy development and operational delivery

Social Security Scotland undertakes **a survey amongst clients and applicants** each year. Part of the survey includes the voluntary capture of equalities data. This data has been used to inform Scottish Government policy development.

For example, helping ensure seldom heard groups access Social Security Scotland for the support they need. These are marginalised communities who experience intersecting disadvantages that make it more difficult to engage with the Social Security system. This includes minoritised ethnic communities, people living with disabilities, impairments and / or chronic ill-health, and other disadvantaged groups in society. Linked to this is the development of the revised Scottish Government benefit-take up strategy which is due for . publication by October 2026.

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Part 2: Demonstrating Progress Since 2023

In our **Mainstreaming Equality Report 2023** we committed to advancing the following actions:

- Action 1: Inclusion focused capacity and capability building to embed a mainstreaming culture
- Action 2: Safe, accessible and inclusive workspaces to improve diversity in our workforce
- Action 3: Equality data improvement to deliver and improve our service

Action 1: Inclusion focused capacity and capability building

“To invest in a dedicated Diversity and Inclusion team and wider function that would lead the organisation to refresh its approach to inclusion and develop a clear direction for future activity. This would focus on all protected characteristics but also the wider forms of diversity that Social Security Scotland proactively acknowledges.”

The following case studies demonstrate our progress towards achieving action 1:

Case Study 1: Dedicated Diversity and Inclusion Team and improvement projects

In October 2023, we created a dedicated Diversity and Inclusion Team. Its purpose was to build the capacity and capability of everyone across our organisation’s various business areas to:

- Improve their understanding of public sector equality duty obligations
- This also included how they can help meet these obligations
- Increase understanding of how to mainstream equality as part of their day-to-day work.

To support this, we identified a number of improvement projects.

Inclusive Communication

We embedded our legal and organisational inclusive communication commitments, principles and activities within our wider equality approach. We have:

- Incorporated the organisation’s Inclusive Communication Action Plan within the new Mainstreaming Inclusive Communication and Equality Strategy.
- Developed our inclusive communication resource hub. We have created a dozen new resources which will support colleagues to communicate more inclusively.
- Created and delivered a range of learning and coaching sessions. Early feedback has shown an increase in the confidence levels of colleagues in their ability to write and speak more inclusively.

- Aligned inclusive communication stakeholder groups with other groups across the organisation including the Operational Reference Group and the Diversity and Inclusion Group.

These developments have supported our colleagues to improve their inclusive communication capability.

Equality Impact Assessments

We introduced a new approach to Equality Impact Assessments. We have:

- Simplified the documentation used throughout the process
- Redesigned our corporate tracker to promote greater transparency and accountability
- Developed a new assurance standard. This ensures we start the impact assessment process at the right time and involving the right people
- Created and delivered new facilitated sessions
- These now support colleagues, helping build capability across the organisation.

Our revised guidance sets clearer expectations upon leaders and managers to have greater input in providing support. Together with the learning sessions, feedback is showing us that this is helping colleagues reach better conclusions.

We are monitoring this new process so we can report and explain our performance and impact. The developing Performance Pack will provide data and insight that allows for greater reporting in the next mainstreaming report in 2027.

Mainstreaming Inclusive Communication and Equality Strategy

The Diversity and Inclusion Team led the development of the new Mainstreaming Inclusive Communication and Equality Strategy. This allowed us to expand our Framework of Practice tool. It now includes all practical activities colleagues in Social Security Scotland can use to further the mainstreaming agenda. How the tool is used will depend on a colleague's job role and work tasks. The tool focuses on a range of areas including:

- Business planning
- Budgets
- Workspaces
- Digital systems
- Learning offers
- Recruitment, retention, and progression.

To support colleagues, we have also developed:

- Guidance
- A digital Framework of Practice tool
- Good practice examples
- A series of annual action statements
- Learning resources.

Together, these will build the capacity and capability of all our colleagues. They will help them clearly understand their everyday role, responsibilities, and expectations to mainstream inclusive communication and equality.

Case Study 2: Establishing the Diversity and Inclusion Group (Collaborative)

In 2024, the Diversity and Inclusion Group, also known as the Collaborative, was established. The purpose of this group is to:

- Identify and deliver solutions to the three areas of concern highlighted through our internal audit process. This included equality co-ordination, delivery and impact.
- Inform the development of our organisation's revised mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality approach.
- Support all business areas with developing their understanding and practice of the evolving Framework of Practice to mainstream inclusive communication and equality.
- Monitor, assesses, report and explain the organisation's performance in relation to mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality.

Some examples of where the Diversity and Inclusion Collaborative has made a notable difference include:

- Enabling the restructure and refocus of our Internal Equalities Network in Social Security Scotland. The network has over 100 members, working across the organisation, and each representing different forms of intersectional diversity and allyship.
- The network continues to ensure the diverse voices and lived experiences of our workforce are heard at all levels and supports the organisation to improve its diversity knowledge and understanding.
- Supporting the development of the Pathway to Inclusion Tool that enables all colleagues to develop and deliver meaningful diversity personal work objectives. The five steps in the tool guide all colleagues, with leaders and managers actively playing their supporting role, to set diversity objectives that are embedded as part of business priority delivery and based on an understanding of diversity within their local business contexts.
- Developing the approach to performance for mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality. Four criteria are now used to monitor, assess, report

and explain the organisation's performance and impact in relation to mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality. The development and use of performance packs provides data and insights to measure success and identify areas for further improvement.

Action 2: Safe, accessible and inclusive workspaces

"To expand our accessibility capability to ensure our workplace continues to remain safe, accessible and inclusive for all. This would focus particularly on our disabled colleagues, our colleagues from minority religions and those colleagues with a reasonable adjustment as identified through our employee and carers passports."

The following case studies demonstrates our progress towards achieving Action 2:

Case Study 1: Test of Change – Accessibility Team

In 2023, we temporarily set up a team to conduct a review of and to improve accessibility. This team conducted a review of the organisation's systems and processes in supporting over 100 colleagues with their additional accessibility needs. The team

- Supported building line manager capability including the ability to demonstrate active allyship to the people and teams they managed
- Created organisational guidance on ordering assistive technology
- Created and delivered awareness sessions on hidden disabilities
- Created and delivered Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) awareness and productivity tools sessions.

Case Study 2: Development of the Accessibility Community of Practice

In 2024, Social Security Scotland established an Accessibility Community of Practice. This included a number of colleagues from relevant key business areas. The role was to implement the recommendations from the organisation's review of accessibility.

As a result of the review, the community of practice made improvements to:

- Investment in digital-led solutions
- The colleague experience
- Online management capability
- Our organisation's governance and culture.

The work of the Community of Practice is ongoing. Further progress will be included in the next mainstreaming report in 2027.

Action 3: Equalities data improvement

“To improve the ways we gather, analyse and use data to better understand the experiences of our diverse colleagues and clients when identifying any differential impacts. We would then develop tailored actions plan to address any differences as we continue to improve our service and delivery. This would focus particularly on clients who had communication / language barriers and clients from seldom heard groups. For context, these are marginalised communities who experience intersecting disadvantages that make it more difficult to engage with the Social Security system. Examples are minoritised ethnic communities, people with disabilities, impairments and or chronic ill health. Children, families and other vulnerable groups are also included.”

The following case study demonstrates our progress towards achieving action 3:

Case Study 1: Equalities data action series

In 2024, we reviewed what equalities data we gathered and analysed and then how we used it to make improvements in support of our diverse workforce and diverse clients. We worked with internal stakeholders from across the organisation and wider Scottish Government to identify strengths and challenge points.

The review found that, though the organisation’s systems and processes did facilitate some equalities data monitoring, several gaps and challenges remained. Without addressing these gaps and challenges, which Social Security Scotland has committed to undertaking over the next three years, we won’t be able to report meaningfully and effectively.

However, our review did also highlight areas where Social Security Scotland could undertake quick action. For example, we:

- Improved equality impact assessment guidance to cover the range of available equalities data. In doing this, colleagues have been guided on when and how to make use of available equalities data to complete equality impact assessments.

- Developed and tested a number of methods to improve data declaration. We worked with a diverse range of colleagues to understand barriers to them providing their equalities data. We did this by building trust and enhancing understanding amongst colleagues from diverse backgrounds. This was done in the organisational change context as we moved from using different human resource management systems. The aspiration is to do the same for our diverse clients.

- Included available equalities data when developing our newly evolving inclusion evidence base. This will guide the organisation to use qualitative and quantitative equalities data to inform product, service and policy development while guiding decision-making.

- Ensured our approach to performance for mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality includes both qualitative and quantitative data. This is through the development of performance packs and an organisational dashboard. This will be tailored to inclusive communication and equality, increasing our organisation's capability.

Further and improved progress will be reported in our next mainstreaming report in 2027.

Case Study 2: Use of equalities data to inform continuous improvement

Social Security Scotland's Client Survey offers our clients the chance to tell us about their views and experiences of the service they received. The latest publication includes responses from our diverse clients who interacted with us between April 2023 and March 2024.

The results have been used to measure how Social Security Scotland is performing and where we can improve our service for all clients. For example, some responses highlighted the continued need to ensure clients have their communication preferences identified and fulfilled. This is a key commitment in Our Charter

We will also carefully consider the findings and recommendations from the **Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment**, as well as from ongoing reports delivered by the **Scottish Commission on Social Security**, in order to improve our service to clients whilst also delivering value for money.

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Part 3: Fulfilling the Public Sector Equality Duty

Social Security Scotland can also demonstrate our progress and impact in relation to the general public sector equality duty:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
- Advancing equality of opportunity
- Fostering good relations.

The following case studies demonstrate our progress towards **eliminating unlawful discrimination:**

Case Study 1: Procurement Strategy and Equality Impact Assessments

In November 2024, we published a refreshed **Corporate Procurement Strategy 2024 – 2027.** This Strategy details the commitment from the Procurement and Commercial team to comply with the Sustainable Procurement Duty described within the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014. The Sustainable Procurement Duty means that before we buy goods or services, we require companies or organisations we are signing contracts with to show how they will improve the social, environmental or economic wellbeing of the local area they operate in, with a particular focus on reducing inequalities.

At the commencement of each procurement process, the Procurement and Commercial team advise of the requirement for completion of an Equality Impact Assessment by the project lead. The procurement professional then liaises with the project lead and the Diversity and Inclusion team throughout the procurement process to ensure relevant outputs of the equality impact assessment are incorporated into the procurement strategy, procurement documentation and resulting contract.

An example of this process was a procurement required for Assistive Technology Training for Social Security Scotland colleagues. An **Equality Impact Assessment** was conducted, with the findings from the assessment used to inform the specification of requirements to be delivered by the appointed contractor.

Case Study 2: Learning Materials and Accessibility Standards

We develop all our learning materials with people's lived experience in mind.

Our Organisational Development team work closely with our research colleagues to understand how our clients feel about their experience with us and discover any barriers they may have to applying for benefits. This helps us understand more about issues affecting our clients and make improvements to our services to tackle stigma and ensure people apply for benefits they may be entitled to.

We develop all learning material in line with **WCAG 2.2 AA standards** . All our trainers' briefs and learner handouts are written inclusively. Using alt text, inclusive headers and clear topics means they are accessible for assistive technology users.

eLearning material is also designed in line with WCAG 2.2 AA standards. This ensures videos include closed captions and alt text for imagery. Video navigation is compatible for assistive technology users.

As part of our learning evaluation, we ask if the learning modules help embed our values of dignity, fairness and respect. From a recent survey of 413 learners, 98.55% responded ‘yes’ to this question.

Case Study 3: Lived Experience

The Education and Development team, which is part of Social Security Scotland’s Health and Social Care Division, have undertaken workshops and ‘in conversation with’ sessions. These brought together health professionals and people with lived experience of specific health conditions.

The sessions gave colleagues a better understanding of the realities experienced by clients and colleagues living with disabilities and health conditions. They were designed to address the barriers that disabled people may face when accessing our services. The learning from these sessions is embedded into training and guidance materials. This ensures that case work, communications and client interactions are more person-centred, fair and sensitive to individual circumstances. They were also designed to challenge unconscious bias and misconceptions and promote understanding of how we should consider equalities in our service delivery. Further sessions have been designed to support colleagues’ understanding. For example, specific workshops were created on schizophrenia, anxiety, and depression.

By deepening staff understanding of the intersectionality between disability, health conditions and inequalities, this work contributes directly to advancing equality of opportunity. It helps to ensure that all clients, regardless of their background or disability, have a fair and supportive experience when applying for benefits.

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The following case studies demonstrate our progress towards advancing equal opportunities:

Case Study 4: Living Hours Accreditation

In May 2024, Social Security Scotland became the first **Living Hours** accredited employer in Dundee City. Living Hours guarantees secure working hours and scheduled working patterns. This is as well as paying the real **Living Wage**.

Our Living Hours commitments include providing our colleagues with

- a guaranteed minimum of 16 hours work a week
- notice of scheduled working days at least four weeks in advance e
- an employment contract that reflects the hours people work.

This helps tackle the impact of insecure work, provides stability of hours and income for people. Whilst these are issues for all workers, research by the Living Wage Foundation indicates that minority ethnic workers, young workers and older workers are disproportionately impacted by insecure work.

By tackling the causes of insecure work, we can advance equality of opportunity and attract, retain and promote more diverse talent to our organisation.

Case study 5: Inclusive Recruitment

Our Resourcing team has taken several steps to remove any barriers and biases in our recruitment processes. This ensures people with protected characteristics have the opportunity to succeed.

We have worked with organisations supporting Care Leavers, Veterans, the Young Person's Guarantee, disabled people and wider diversity initiatives. This ensures people from as many communities as possible are aware of what we offer as employers.

We have hosted information days and online workshops. These allow potential candidates to gain first-hand insight into roles, hear from colleagues who have lived experience and receive practical support with applications.

Since May 2023, we have provided opportunities to 41 individuals through six employability schemes:

- Care Leavers Internship
- Who Cares Scotland
- Get Veterans into Work
- Fair Start
- Modern Apprenticeships
- Discovery Works

The impact of inclusive recruitment on candidates cannot be understated. As evidenced by Veterans who have been feeding back following their onboarding journey with us:

- “I didn’t have the confidence to apply elsewhere… the scheme helped me put myself out there and avoid the fear of rejection.”
- “It supports individuals who may face barriers to entering the Civil Service through traditional methods.”.

Nine people who joined us through these schemes have already secured permanent positions within the organisation. We hope to increase this from the further 20 people who have recently started working with us.

Case Study 6: Inclusive Communication

We have continued to make progress in the implementation of our previous Inclusive Communication Action Plan. Over the last three years, we have:

- Created resources to help colleagues understand what it means to communicate inclusively including when speaking, writing and hosting meetings
- Increased the capability of our workforce by delivering learning sessions to help support colleagues to develop the attitude, knowledge and skills required to communicate inclusively
- Involved people with lived experience of communicating differently in several research initiatives
- Established governance processes that will allow us to demonstrate how we are progressing towards our ambition to become a communication inclusive organisation.

Case Study 7: Accessibility

As of January 2025, we have over 100 colleagues who use one or more pieces of assistive technology software. We have built accessibility into the design, development and delivery of our digital systems. Prior to purchasing new software, an accessibility specialist conducts an audit of each supplier’s product. If a product is identified as being non-compliant with industry recognised WCAG standards, we will not purchase it.

Once software is purchased, or there is a change to existing software, an accessibility audit is conducted to identify issues which could result in users being unable to complete their task. For example, unclear instructions on a form, or no instructions or labels resulting in screen readers being unable to read a page. This ensures software and services can be used by a wide range of users.

New software or changes to existing software is also user tested with individuals who:

- use a range of assistive technology; and
- may have wider communication support needs.

For each software or system, a range of users are invited to test, representing different lived experiences. Users are asked to complete a range of tasks. This acts to ‘stress-test’ the system and identify areas that are not accessible or are not a good user experience. Researchers then work with developers and accessibility specialists to update the software, or system, taking on board user feedback where appropriate. This ensures the end user is part of the development process.

The following case studies demonstrate our progress towards fostering good relations:

Case Study 8: Internal Equalities Network and the Quarterly Festival of Diversity

Our Internal Equalities Network has continued to focus on providing peer support to diverse colleagues and raising awareness across different forms of diversity. This is always with a view to knowledge and awareness raising and fostering good working relationships across Social Security Scotland.

We currently have 115 members from all different areas of the organisation. Of these members:

- 75 identify as having a protected characteristic
- 35 identify with one of the wider forms of diversity we recognise
- 41 have joined with the aim of becoming an active ally to our diverse colleagues
- 26 colleagues who have joined to become an active ally to our diverse colleagues
- 48 have joined with a focus on embedding intelligent kindness
- 11 are from a team that can support us to embed inclusive communications and equality

We piloted our first quarterly Festival of Diversity in the last three months of 2024. From October 2024 to May 2025, we have:

- Hosted a series of 4 colleague events. These were attended by colleagues from different areas and across the organisation
- Promoted learning resources including on ‘Black History Month’ and Trans Allyship.
- Colleagues sharing lived experiences through 6 blog posts. These have achieved a total of 8485 views
- Internal communication activity. This includes two Saltire articles summarising our events and actions during our quarterly festivals of diversity. These achieved 794 views so far and prompted contact from colleagues, sharing what they wanted to see in future quarters.

We aim to raise awareness across all different forms of diversity at different time. We have recognised many key awareness dates including:

- Care Experienced Week
- Black History Month
- Interfaith Week
- Remembrance Day
- Transgender Day of Remembrance
- St Andrews Day
- International Day of Persons with Disabilities
- Burns Night
- LGBT History Month
- International Mother Language Day
- International Women's Day
- National Day for Staff Networks

Colleagues at all levels and business areas from across the organisation participated including our Executive Team. We have designed a Festival of Diversity to run across all four quarters of 2025. This will cover different forms of diversity in each quarter to ensure most of those acknowledged by Social Security Scotland have been represented throughout the year.

Case Study 9: Ramadan Awareness Line Manager Sessions

As Muslim colleagues prepared to welcome Ramadan in early March 2024, we organised and facilitated four line manager awareness sessions which were delivered across the organisation. These were repeated in February 2025.

The purpose of these sessions was to promote relevant organisational policy and tailored guidance. The sessions also enabled line managers of Muslim colleagues to share practice of how colleagues could be supported in the workplace for the duration of Ramadan. A lived experience approach was utilised with line managers and colleagues sharing their personal and professional lived experiences throughout the four sessions and celebration event.

While the sessions were primarily aimed at line managers of Muslim colleagues, attendance was encouraged from any line manager or colleague who wanted to find out more about how best to support Muslim colleagues in the workplace during Ramadan.

Of those colleagues who provided feedback, our analysis show:

- 83% have an increased understanding of Muslim colleagues' requirements during the Ramadan and Eid period.
- 73% have an increased skill level in relation to supporting Muslim colleagues during Ramadan and Eid.

- 75% say their confidence level in relation to supporting Muslim colleagues during Ramadan and Eid had increased.
- 78% say they improved their ability to support Muslim colleagues during Ramadan and Eid.

Case Study 10: Commitment to long-term change

In 2023, we renewed our Young Person's Guarantee. This reinforces our commitment to supporting young people through work experience, employability mentoring, and partnerships.

In 2024, we expanded our work with Care Leavers and Veterans. We worked closely with Who Cares Scotland and the Scottish Government Veterans Unit to employ 19 Client Advisors on 12-month fixed-term contracts with the option to extend. We ensured that hiring managers were equipped with training on how to support these colleagues, given the challenges they may have faced.

We are currently developing a recruitment engagement strategy. This will inform and support our activity across three key areas of engagement:

- enhance employability.
- promote diversity.
- strengthen opportunities to support and develop our diverse talent.

This will include developing stronger links with communities and stakeholders to help us understand and resolve barriers to recruitment.

For example, recruitment data shows that we attract high numbers of applications from people from minority ethnic backgrounds. They also progress well in our recruitment process.

However, we do not see similar levels of success for disabled candidates. In 2024/25, only 5% of people applying to work for us have this protected characteristic. This is compared with the Scottish population figure of 21% of people who identify themselves as disabled.

To improve these figures, we will focus on engaging with disability groups and stakeholders. We will engage with Scottish Government to align with wider activity and action plans that support individuals with disabilities gaining sustainable employment. This will help us understand if there are unseen barriers to our application process and address them to ensure we attract a wide pool of candidates including those with a diversity of skills, thought, experience and background.

Actions taken to improve process inclusivity for candidates does show positive signs, however. Feedback gathered from applicants indicate the 93% of candidate found the application process user friendly.

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Part 4: Setting Equality Outcomes 2025 - 2029

In 2025, Social Security Scotland published its internal Mainstreaming Inclusive Communication and Equality Strategy, along with its supporting resources. This continues commitments and progress outlined in the organisation's previous Equality Strategy and Inclusive Communication Action Plan.

Our Approach

Central to delivery is the Framework of Practice. This framework guides the whole organisation to act on advancing the three outcomes 2025 - 2029. A package of support including guidance, a digital framework of practice tool, good practice examples and learning resources has been developed to support everyone in the organisation to deliver the actions agreed.

These actions are included in our series of annual Action Statements. The 2025 statements will be revised in 2026 and 2027. The responsibility for delivery is for:

- Senior leaders, hiring and line managers across the organisation.
- Teams working in operations and supporting functions across the organisation.
- A range of network, groups, forums, trade union and all colleagues across the organisation.

An approach to performance for mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality will monitor, assess, report and explain the organisation's performance and impact to our governance structures on a quarterly and annual basis. This will be overseen by the Diversity and Inclusion Group, also known as the Collaborative.

Our outcomes, framework of practice and series of annual actions

By incorporating our inclusive communication obligations as part of our wider equality obligations, we have developed a set of outcomes that will enable us to fulfil our obligations over the next four years.

Social Security Scotland has developed the following three outcomes:

- Outcome 1 – embedding a mainstreaming culture.
- Outcome 2 – diversity in leadership and management
- Outcome 3 – improving service and experience of clients from diverse backgrounds.

Outcome 1 – embedding a mainstreaming culture.

“To mainstream inclusive communication and equality. This means raising awareness and confidence levels amongst everyone in the organisation to use the framework of practice to support and empower our diverse colleagues to have better work life experiences. This includes colleagues who have an employee passport, reasonable adjustments and carers passport.”

In developing this outcome, we have used available evidence including the people survey results to determine our diversity focus. We have set this outcome because Social Security Scotland still needs to make further progress to mainstream inclusive communication and equality.

The ambition is to mainstream as part of everyday business priorities and activities across every business area in the organisation. By progressing this outcome, we will enable inclusive culture change across the organisation.

To measure our progress on this outcome, we will use data gathered in relation to our Framework of Practice. This will enable improved reporting on organisational performance and impact which will help us explain how we are achieving this outcome.

Some areas of the Framework of Practice that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- Understanding the organisation’s approach for the next three years
- Pathway to Inclusion Tool for Diversity Objective Setting
- Inclusive Budgets for Best Value - Fairness and Equality

Some actions in the series of action statements for 2025 that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- To understand how to embed the framework of practice within their business areas, senior leaders participate in coaching for mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality.
- Finance and Corporate Services teams will collaborate with the Diversity and Inclusion team to develop how Social Security Scotland continues to meet its Best Value for Fairness and Equality obligations.
- Colleagues completing equality impact assessments will follow the guidance on how to do this, in collaboration with their senior leaders, line managers and business areas.

The series of annual action statements will be revised in 2026 and 2027.

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Outcome 2 – diversity in leadership and management

"To support diversity in leadership and management roles. This means improving the support offered to diverse colleagues to progress in their careers either at current grade and profession or across grades and professions. This includes colleagues who identify as LGBT, minority ethnic, disabled, being part of a minority religion."

We have set this outcome because we want to improve diverse representation throughout our organisation. Social Security Scotland has a diverse workforce, but that diversity does not reflect fully in the leadership and management structures of the organisation. We recognise there is a gap in the data that will help confirm this. Using our Oracle HR system and with additional data reporting, we hope to be able to fill this gap. In developing this outcome, we have used currently available diversity and inclusion workforce data to determine our diversity focus.

The ambition is to support colleagues from diverse backgrounds with career development either in their current role and grade or progressing through role and grades. This will enable Social Security Scotland to promote diversity at every level and practice inclusive recruitment, retention and progression.

To measure our progress on this outcome, we will use workforce diversity data and charter measurement survey data. We will report on organisational performance and impact and explain how we are achieving this outcome.

Some areas of the Framework of Practice that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- Strategic design principles and tools.
- Inclusive Recruitment and onboarding.
- All colleague learning including leadership and management learning.

Some actions in the series of action statements for 2025 that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- Line managers will use the 'Be an Active Ally' resource to support colleagues they line manage who are from diverse backgrounds.
- Insights and Analysis will collaborate with the Diversity and Inclusion team to continue resolving the gaps and challenges found by the Equality Data Action Series undertaken in 2024.
- All colleagues will work with the Diversity and Inclusion team, senior leaders and line managers to use the Pathway to Inclusion Tool. This will help them develop and deliver meaningful diversity objectives that are aligned to other key work objectives, business priorities and workplace context.

The series of annual action statements will be revised in 2026 and 2027.

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Outcome 3 – improving service and experience of clients from diverse backgrounds.

“To improve service provision and experience felt by diverse clients. This means exploring different stages of the client journey. This will include exploring opportunities to maximise benefit take up amongst those who identify as being part of seldom-heard groups. This will also include deepening our understanding of the reasons for some diverse clients having the lowest approval rates. This includes clients who identify as minority ethnic, disabled, LGBT or lower socio-economic.”

In developing this outcome, we have used available client data and collaborated with Scottish Government Social Security policy to determine our diversity focus. We have set this outcome because Social Security Scotland has worked with Scottish Government Social Security Policy colleagues to identify parts of the client journey to explore, understand and improve.

The ambition is to ensure all our diverse clients have a positive experience accessing and using our services. Social Security Scotland has a diverse client base across Scotland, and we want to deliver a high-quality service in line with our organisational charter and our fairness, dignity and respect values.

To measure our progress on this outcome, we will use client and applicant equality data, client survey and charter measurement survey to report on organisational performance and impact. We will also continue to work closely with Scottish Government Social Security Policy to progress activities in support of this outcome. This will enable Social Security Scotland to monitor, assess, report and explain how we are achieving this outcome.

Some areas of the Framework of Practice that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- Stakeholder and partner engagement
- Operational delivery learning including understanding diversity data
- Improving the service and experience of diverse clients

Some actions in the series of action statements for 2025 that will help deliver progress on this outcome are as follows:

- Senior Leaders in Client Services Delivery will collaborate with subject matter experts and policy colleagues to explore the inclusion evidence base resource. This will deliver improvements to service and experience for diverse clients.
- Teams across the organisation will read and discuss the Inclusive Communication pack, for everyday use in the delivery of business priorities and activities.

The series of annual action statements will be revised in 2026 and 2027.

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Our Next Steps

Social Security Scotland will

- Provide an update on our progress of advancing the three outcomes 2025 – 2029 outlined in this report through our next Mainstreaming Equality Report in 2027
- Publish the next Mainstreaming Equality Report by June 2027 and a further report by June 2029 in line with our legal obligations
- Begin revising the organisation's mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality strategy in 2028
- Revise the equality outcomes in 2029, as required every four years, in line with our legal obligations
- Publish the revised mainstreaming inclusive communication and equality strategy and revised equality outcomes in 2029.

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Annex A: Social Security Scotland Workforce Diversity Information

Social Security Scotland has available published diversity data in relation to:

- Age
- Sex
- Disability
- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Socio economic background

This data is collected and sourced from overall Scottish Government data. Full data sets for each available year can be found from the following sources:

- **Diversity and inclusion of the Scottish Government workforce - 2024**
- **Diversity and Inclusion of the Scottish Government workforce - 2023**
- **Diversity and inclusion of the Scottish Government workforce - 2022**
- **Diversity and inclusion of the Scottish Government workforce - 2020**

Readers Note:
This report does not include workforce data for 2021. This is because of a change in the publication process in 2022. Some data sets were presented with different categories.

You can view the data by accessing the **Social Security Scotland – workforce information: September 2024**. Social Security Scotland statistics are available as part of the Excel spreadsheet towards the bottom of the web page.

Further Readers Note:
To facilitate comparison with Scotland's population, staff that have not answered a given diversity question have been excluded from the percentages shown in the tables below. Where this is the case, we have used the calculation % = Number/ (Total – Unknown) to arrive at the figures presented.

Age

Age	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 - 2024
16 – 29	14.5%	17.4%	22.3%	24.3%	- 9.8%
30 – 39	32.2%	31.3%	30.5%	27.1%	+ 5.1%
40 – 49	26.3%	25.7%	23.9%	25.4%	+ 0.9%
50 – 59	21.5%	21.0%	19.6%	20.3%	+ 1.2%
60+	5.5%	4.8%	3.6%	2.9%	+ 2.6%

The data shows us that between 2020 – 2024, the majority of our workforce has remained between the ages of 30 – 59. Trends show that the younger workforce has decreased while the older workforce has increased.

Sex

Sex	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 - 2024
Female	61%	61.1%	61%	60.5%	+ 0.4%
Male	39%	38.9%	39%	39.5%	- 0.5%

The data shows an almost static sex make up of our workforce between 2020 – 2024. A 60 percent to 40 percent split towards a female majority workforce is also evident.

Disability

Disability	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 - 2024
Disabled	27.2%	20.0%	18.6%	16.1%	+ 11.1%
Not Disabled	67.0%	76.8%	78.2%	81.97%	- 14.97%
Prefer not to say	5.8%	3.2%	3.2%	1.97%	+ 3.83%

The data shows an increase in colleagues identifying with and or disclosing a disability between 2020 - 2024. The trends show an increase in ‘Prefer not to say’ also.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 - 2024
Minority Ethnic	7.1%	6.3%	6.2%	3.7%	+ 3.4%
White	90.7%	92.5%	92.6%	95.9%	- 5.2%
Prefer not to say	2.2%	1.1%	0.8%	0.4%	+ 1.8%

The data shows an increase in an ethnically diverse workforce but again there is a growing trend of Prefer not to say’.

Religion

Religion	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 – 2024
Any other religion	5.6%	5.4%	5.3%	3.2%	+ 2.4%
Christian	30.7%	32.7%	32.3%	35.6%	- 4.9%
None	57.4%	57.1%	57.6%	58.4%	- 1.0%
Prefer not to say	6.3%	4.8%	4.8%	2.8%	+ 3.5%

The data shows an increase in a workforce identifying with minority religions. Again, the growing trend of ‘Prefer not to say’ is also evident.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual Orientation	2024	2023	2022	2020	% increase / decrease (+ / -) between 2020 - 2024
LGBTI+	12.1%	10.7%	11.0%	8.3%	+ 3.8%
Heterosexual	82.7%	85.6%	85.3%	89.1%	- 6.4%
Prefer not to say	5.2%	3.7%	3.8%	2.6%	+ 2.6%

The data shows an increase in a workforce identifying as LGBTI+. There is also a growing trend of Prefer not to say’.

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Annex B: Pay Gap and Equal Pay Statement

Background

Social Security Scotland staff in Bands A-C are subject to the same pay policy, terms and conditions as all staff within the Scottish Government Main bargaining unit. This includes the use of the same policies and process in relation to job evaluation, pay & grading, pay structure, remuneration levels, and pay review.

Social Security Scotland staff in the Senior Civil Service (SCS) are subject to the same pay policy, terms and conditions as all SCS staff within the Scottish Government. This includes the use of the same policies and process in relation to job evaluation, pay & grading, pay structure, remuneration levels, and pay review.

Equal Pay Statement

For more detail, you can read the **Scottish Government Pay Gap and Equal Pay Statement**

This annual Scottish Government publication covers Scottish Government Main which includes Social Security Scotland. Social Security Scotland will continue to report this information as part of our Mainstreaming Equality reports every two years.

While the specific public sector equality duties only require publication of gender pay gap information, Social Security Scotland will also publish pay gap information for ethnicity and disability.

Having access to and embedding diversity of thought, experience, skills and background is essential for Social Security Scotland to deliver social security payments on behalf of Scottish Ministers. From our establishment, our core values of fairness, dignity and respect have guided how we deliver.

Tackling inequalities and embedding equality, inclusion, and human rights into our work requires sustained focus and action. By living our values and focussing on this agenda, we will ensure that Social Security Scotland is not only a force for change but also an exemplar employer for equality and inclusion.

The Scottish Government provides a pay and grading system to Social Security Scotland.

The Scottish Government pay and reward system is transparent, based on objective criteria and free from bias so that equal pay applies at every level of Social Security Scotland. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, we are committed to a policy of equal pay between:

- men and women
- people who are disabled and people who are not disabled
- people who fall into a minority racial group and people who do not

Pay Gap Information

Published pay gap information for Social Security Scotland is available in relation to the following diverse groups:

- Sex
- Disability
- Ethnicity

The table below provides this pay gap information as of 31 December 2024:

Characteristic Type	Mean Gap in Social Security Scotland	Mean Gap in Scottish Government	Median Gap in Social Security Scotland	Median Gap in Scottish Government
Sex	4.4%	2.82%	0.0%	6.31%
Disability	8.4%	9.22%	4.7%	10.56%
Ethnicity	2.5%	8.20%	0.0%	9.71%

A positive pay gap indicates where male staff, white staff and non-disabled staff have a pay lead.

The analysis only includes those who have declared diversity data in relation to sex, disability and ethnicity.

This data is collected and sourced from overall Scottish Government data. Full data sets for each available year can be found from the following source:

- **Diversity and inclusion of the Scottish Government workforce - 2024**

Data on other organisations can be found at **Search and compare gender pay gap data - Gender pay gap service - GOV.UK**.

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