



National Equality Outcomes Sectoral Event 2024 Outcome Report



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba



Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

National Equality Outcomes Sectoral Event 2024 Outcome Report

Issue Date:	10 October 2024
Summary:	A summary of the National Equality Outcomes Sectoral Event and its outcomes.
FAO:	Attendees of the National Equality Outcomes Sectoral Event and relevant stakeholders.
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National Equality Outcomes - Where are we now?

Memorandum of Understanding

1. The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) entered a joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in 2019. The main purpose of this MoU is to advance equality for college and university students and staff by strengthening joint working between EHRC and SFC. The MoU included a joint action plan which included an action dedicated to investigating the persistent inequalities in the sector.

Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together Report

2. A key priority in the EHRC/SFC action plan was to agree the most pressing inequalities that the sector should be acting on and to set National Equality Outcomes (NEOs). NEOs are focused on inequalities which are evidenced to be persistent at a national scale. To address these issues, we need institutions to work with, and for students and staff to contribute towards, a set of outcomes to make the tertiary system fairer and equitable.
3. The NEOs were published in the [Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together](#) report in January 2023 and were developed with a Persistent Inequality and Outcomes Group. This included the EHRC, SFC, Equality leads and planners from the sector and charities. It also included input from those with lived experience. The evidence considered was based on published reports and data and the NEOs strongly align to the data provided in SFC statistical publications including the Report on Widening Access.
4. The NEOs include consideration of:
 - Success and retention rates of students and seeks improvements, at a national scale, for older students in the university sector and younger students in the college sector.
 - Satisfaction levels of disabled students in relation to the reasonable adjustments put in place to support their learning and student experience.
 - The imbalance on courses by sex.
 - The mental health of staff and students and seeks improvements in student learning outcomes and assurances of access to mental health support.
 - The safety of students and staff and steps taken to address harassment particularly in relation to disability, race, sexual orientation, trans identity and religion and belief.
 - Responding to the Scottish Government's Equally Safe strategy particularly in relation to prevention, support and response mechanisms.
 - Proportionate representation of staff, Boards and Courts particularly in relation to race and disability.
5. Within the report, SFC and EHRC committed to hosting a sectoral event to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the NEOs and how we can work together to make progress. As such, the National Equality Outcomes Sectoral Event was held on May 7th, 2024, at Stirling Court Hotel. The Agenda for the event can be found in Annex A.

Attendance

- We received over 100 registrations to attend the event. There were representatives from 15 colleges and 16 universities. 18 representatives from students' unions and associations, which included 14 student representatives, attended the event. There was also representation from sector agency groups including; Colleges Scotland, College Development Network, Universities Scotland, [Lead Scotland](#) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA).
- Staff who attended the event held a wide variety of roles within the sector including those from human resources, planning, student experience, wellbeing and inclusion and teaching and learning. This emphasised the broad plethora of roles where responsibility for equality, diversity and inclusion are being taken forward.

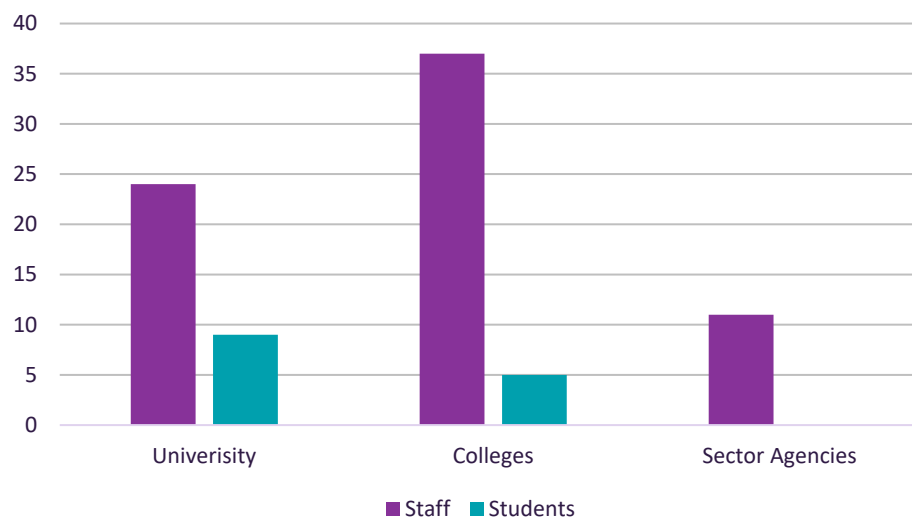


Figure 1: Attendee registration.

Sector Updates

SFC Update

- SFC provided context and background on the NEOs for attendees at the start of the day. SFC also provided a brief overview of the common themes found in the Institutional public sector equality reports published in 2023. These include actions around data collection and the use of data to support addressing areas of challenge, looking at staff representation within institutions, creating Anti-Racist Curricula and addressing awarding gaps, addressing the increasing need for mental health support, tackling the gender imbalance on certain courses and the reporting and support structures within institutions for those who experience harassment or discrimination. Attendees were encouraged to reflect on whether this aligned with their understanding of their institution's priorities moving into the 2025 reporting cycle.

Scottish Government Update

- Jenny Kemp, the Policy and Engagement Team Lead within the Mainstreaming and Strategy Unit provided an update on Public Sector Equality Duty Improvement Activity. This included setting out the current requirements with respect to PSED reporting and outlining improvements to the process the team is hoping to move forward to support the effectiveness of PSED reporting. It

was confirmed that SG are taking a phased approach to this work and that these will not be requirements ahead of the 2025 reporting deadline but useful for attendees to understand the direction of travel for this work.

EHRC Update

10. EHRC colleagues provided an update ahead of the 2025 PSED reporting cycle. EHRC outlined the support they wish to provide to the sector, including the prospect of workshops later in the year for those responsible for writing PSED reports. EHRC outlined their expectations for PSED reports, emphasising reports should be published in an accessible manner by 30th April 2025. EHRC stressed the need for a focus on transparency and impact of the work being undertaken by institutions to be reflected in the reports. The importance of evidence was also raised both in what institutions are working on and to justify areas where there is less focus.

Workshops

11. The event included multiple workshops sessions which were a chance for attendees to come together in small groups to discuss and provide feedback on a series of prompt questions relating to each topic. Sessions were facilitated by SFC and EHRC with the intention of being a listening exercise to inform priorities for the NEO work moving forward.

Thematic Reviews

12. Attendees were invited to contribute their thoughts to inform future thematic reviews which will support the development and progression of the NEOs. Groups were given a series of prompt questions to steer discussions regarding thematic reviews and their experience of the NEOs so far. The prompt questions can be found in Annex C.
13. Groups identified multiple areas where it was felt there could be benefit from a thematic review. There were multiple groups who identified intersectionality both between the NEOs themselves and between students with protected characteristics and other areas of challenge including poverty, care experience, estrangement etc.
14. There was a desire for a clearer definition of 'feelings of safety' including how this is measured. It was noted by participants that there is currently no metric or data collected for feelings of safety and further guidance is needed to provide clarity around how this should be defined and assessed by institutions. It was questioned whether a question could be added to national surveys (college survey, NSS) to provide greater insight into this area. While feelings of safety was the most prominent area identified in terms of data gaps and need for support there is a need for greater data reporting tools (through the measurement framework) and supporting processes, such as including how to measure impact consistently across the sector.
15. The groups also identified particular characteristics where they could benefit from greater information including;
 - Disability (specifically neurodiversity).
 - Race (particularly where the institution population is not reflective of local areas).
 - Pregnancy and maternity.
 - Gender reassignment.

16. One group identified the need for a review of mainstreaming of equality, diversity and inclusion among staff within institutions and the need for a cultural shift to embed this work.
17. The groups were asked to reflect on which of the NEOs/equality areas were most challenging for their institution. The answers provided were wide ranging and reflected the diversity of the institutions. The most challenging areas identified included;
 - The diversity of staff representation.
 - Mental health.
 - Gender balance across courses.
 - Balancing the needs of different groups.
 - Gender reassignment.
 - Support for refugees and asylum seekers.
18. There was a diversity of opinion regarding the accessibility of data. Groups identified inequalities in the capacity available for data support between different organisations which could lead to challenges in terms of the collection and analysis of data at an institutional level. It was noted that there is a difference between the data being available and being accessible in a user-friendly manner to non-data specialist staff. It was felt there is a need for more guidance to harmonise how data is collected and reported to ensure greater consistency and comparability across the sector particularly with regards to creating baselines.
19. There was a desire to see questions around safety added to student satisfaction surveys (e.g. NSS) to support data collection. Groups identified that they would benefit from data from schools to support transition into tertiary education and support to improve data collection from staff and students (clearer purpose for data collection). The attendees noted the challenges with self-declaration of data and the impact this has on reliability.
20. Attendees felt there was value in external input into the thematic review recognising that some areas would require specialist analysis. The potential for cross-sector thematic reviews was raised. In terms of involvement, workshop groups identified the QAA, students, charities and relevant stakeholders as some of the people who should be involved in such reviews.
21. Beyond the thematic reviews, the groups felt that further good practice sharing events would benefit colleagues. There was interest in focused work on addressing gender imbalances on courses. The areas identified where the sector could benefit from further support included further support on intersectionality, work on trans inclusivity and funding and training for developing EDI.

Leadership Sessions

22. Attendees were invited to contribute their thoughts to inform the development of leadership sessions regarding EDI and the NEOs. This was a development that originated from the sector and this session was designed to help us develop our understanding of sector needs in this space. The prompt questions for this workshop can be found in Annex C.
23. There was a consensus from attendees that they would like future leadership sessions to be mandatory for all institutions in order to achieve buy in. It was felt that if the session sought to engage senior leaders in institutions it should be led by senior members of SFC and EHRC in

conjunction with sector bodies (Colleges Scotland and Universities Scotland).

24. There was recognition of the need to engage with leaders at all levels within institutions and across student facing and professional services areas. Some contributors felt it would be beneficial to offer the training within the institution to provide context and it should be delivered in conjunction with EDI staff from the institution.
25. Attendees want the sessions to include reinforcement on the importance of mainstreaming EDI within an institution alongside the statutory obligations and other reporting obligations. There was no consensus in terms of preferred mode of delivery. Multiple groups identified case studies and real-life examples as an impactful way to convey the importance of EDI.
26. Attendees noted some of the barriers to achieving EDI goals included limited staff time and resources, competing priorities, staff and student sabbatical turnover, funding and lack of senior ownership.
27. There was a desire for the leadership sessions to promote and showcase more cross sector collaboration including the work of sector groups (such as LEAD Scotland, etc.) and encouraging regional approaches to drive forward work on the NEOs. It was also suggested that there should be funding made available for institutions to deliver sector wider toolkits to support the NEOs (e.g. Equally Safe).

Meaningful Action Planning

28. EHRC are committed to continuing their partnership working with SFC and the FE & HE sectors (including student bodies) – EHRC believe that collaborating to share our respective knowledge and expertise will give us the best chance to have a positive impact on the most significant inequalities in tertiary education.
29. Colleges and universities will have adopted some or all of the [equality outcomes](#) defined in the [‘Tackling persistent inequalities together’ report](#). Institutions chances of achieving these equality outcomes will largely rely on effective and meaningful action planning. EHRC delivered a workshop on meaningful action planning during the event that has been summarised below.
30. When planning activity, institutions were reminded that equality outcomes should be viewed as a tool that will help further the [three needs of the PSED](#). Chapter 3 of EHRC's [Scotland PSED Technical Guidance](#) is quite prescriptive in describing the types of activity you might consider in order to further each of the three needs.
31. Equality outcomes can be short, medium or long term. On a practical level, this means that when institutions are thinking about their 2025-29 equality outcomes, they might want to consider:
 - Concluding the outcomes they adopted in 2021 or 2023 – if the institution has done all it can, or evidence points the institution towards prioritising other equality outcomes.
 - Continuing some of their equality outcomes (with revisions based upon the institutions resource, learning and evidence etc.) for some of the 25-29 cycle, or set them subject to review in, say, 2027.
 - Continuing some of their equality outcomes (with revisions based upon the institutions resource, learning and evidence etc) for the whole 25-29 cycle. These are long term outcomes, likely focussed on some of the most difficult and entrenched inequalities, and it may take longer than one reporting cycle to achieve impact.

32. To ensure that progress against the NEOs is measurable and to be able to see if the institution is having an impact, good data is needed. Using best principles in data collection (such as data harmonisation and data minimisation) can help ensure data subjects have trust in providing information and the institution has confidence in the quality of their data. EHRC's guide, [Evidence and the Public Sector Equality Duty](#), is a helpful resource.
33. When updating the NEOs, it is important to consider new forms of data and evidence, such as the [Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Scotland Fairer](#) (2023) report and the forthcoming Scotland's Census 2022 results. It is also important to involve people who share a relevant protected characteristic and any person which appears to represent the interests of those people.
34. Finally, it is likely institutions will be faced with data gaps. When existing monitoring and reporting systems do not adequately capture the problem, an output of a NEO might be to have effective monitoring and reporting systems in place by a given date.
35. SFC and EHRC are aware that not all institutions will progress with every NEO. This could be due to resource or capacity issues or local evidence demonstrating that a particular NEO is not relevant to an institution. Where this is the case, institutions are expected to:
 - Outline why they are not progressing with particular NEOs and their plan for how they will address them in future, or
 - Outline why they are not progressing with particular NEOs and summarise the steps they will take to keep relevant local evidence under review.

Workshop Sharing Session

36. Attendees were given the opportunity to share their takeaways from the workshops to the wider group in the afternoon. This session mainly focused on the Thematic Review and Leadership Session workshops but general feedback on the event was also provided. A summary of what was shared during this session is outlined below, the illustrations done by Swanton Sketches can be viewed in Annex B.
 - Thematic Review
 - Generally, the groups did not land on a consensus for what NEOs the thematic reviews should focus on. It was stated that this could be down the complexity of inequality and barriers faced by students.
 - However, there were common themes in the discussions in these two areas:
 - Attendees highlighted a lack of understanding of what is meant by the term 'feeling of safety' used through the NEOs. Attendees asked if this was more focussed on physical or emotional safety and it was suggested that this could be an area that is investigated further through a thematic review.
 - Attendees spoke about areas they felt were missing from the NEOs, this included student parents, poverty, widening participation, and

social deprivation. Currently, the NEOs are focussed on protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010¹.

- There was a large focus on data when discussing the thematic reviews. This included discussing whether students and staff trusted what was being done with their sensitive data and ways institutions can share best practice on the use of data.
 - Attendees also highlighted the need to ensure the thematic reviews made space and captured student voice and experiences.
 - Attendees raised that due to ongoing systemic barriers to accessing education and employment, individuals are not captured in the data sets being considered. This lack of a representative picture in institutional data means that there is a greater challenge in recognising the support which students and staff need in order to thrive.
- Leadership Session
 - Attendees stated the need to support senior leaders with the general feeling of discomfort that is often felt when speaking about equality, diversity and inclusion issues. It was highlighted that in order to achieve meaningful change, feelings of discomfort need to be addressed.
 - To create leadership sessions that will enable positive impact and empower EDI practitioners, students need to be seen as experts and their lived experiences need to be included in the sessions.

Presentations

37. Between the workshops, the day also included presentation sessions aiming to share good practice and provoke reflection from attendees about the work being undertaken in their institutions. These included a presentation on considering and enabling student engagement in equality work in institutions and case study presentations from institutions on projects designed to support equalities work with students. It is hoped that the institutional presentations will be the first of many case studies which can be shared with the sector to facilitate knowledge exchange and collaboration moving forward.

Student Engagement in Equality

38. Erica Russell-Hensens, Deputy Director for Student Interests, Access and Quality at SFC provided insight into how we have begun to translate the challenges set out in the Tackling Persistent Inequalities report into action and encouraged attendees to consider how, collectively, we work in partnership with students.
39. To do that, attendees were asked to recognise the power imbalance present in the relationship between organisations, their staff and their students and recognise the reasons why students may feel unable to contribute in local or national contexts. Increasing financial burdens for students, increasing demands on well-being and health services and the inequalities that persist

¹ [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://legislation.gov.uk)

throughout the sector may all contribute to this, it could also stem from the infrastructure or approach which is taken and we must strive to ensure that the way in which we work is student centered, collaborative and partnership-led, open and equal.

40. SFC proposed the question, '*Student Engagement in equality – what does it mean now and what could it mean in the future?*' Within the Tackling Persisting Inequalities Report institutions were asked to; consider the NEO's, outline the institutions' contributions to tackling them, and to work with students to address those inequalities. It is recognised that across institutions and campuses, collaboration and engagement will already be happening, either through established networks and processes or as a result of the creation and development of new ones. Sharing practice, trying new approaches and taking the time to create environments that are safe and welcoming are all important if we are to work in partnership to achieve our goals.

North East Scotland College

41. North East Scotland College (NESCol) provided an overview of their gender affirming care fund project. In conjunction with the student LGBTQ+ executive officer, the team set up a fund through which transgender students (including those who identified as non-binary, gender queer or gender exploring) could apply for up to £40 to purchase gender affirming items, services or experiences. Kirsty spoke about the considerations in developing the fund and processes to ensure the fund was accessible to students, met their needs and how it could be linked to further support within the college. She discussed the implementation of the fund and student uptake. In terms of the impact of the fund students reported increased confidence, comfort, attendance and self-esteem. They also reported less gender dysphoria, isolation and pain. The project provided a practical mechanism by which students felt able to engage with college and access further support available to them.

Edinburgh Napier University

42. Edinburgh Napier University were invited to discuss their Student Voice Project which has been used as a case study in the RAISE (Researching, Advancing and Inspiring Student Engagement) Good Practice Guide. This project saw student partners design and execute a research project and make recommendations to improve student engagement and feedback opportunities in the School of Applied Sciences. Student participants had the strongest opinions about the timing and ease of participating in feedback and understanding what happens to it. The statement 'The University Values my Feedback and Cares What I Think' had the strongest response. The conclusions from this work reflected the need for a variety of channels to provide feedback which should be quick, timely and anonymous, recognizing the pressures students face. There is a need to ensure that students play a part in the whole feedback cycle, from design to action, and that the action taken as a result of feedback is visible in order for them to understand the impact of their contributions and that their feedback (and they) matter.

Glasgow Clyde College

43. Glasgow Clyde College presented the work they have been undertaking in conjunction with Brothers in Arms to support mental health. This was developed in the context of student and staff feedback that there was increasing need for support for the higher presentation rate of complex mental health needs. The college seeks to have a nurture approach to ensure that college activities, relationships and the environment are welcoming, safe and respectful for all. The project initially involved training staff and students within the hair and barbering courses to have 'reach in' conversations with clients and to support them with signposting for those who

may be struggling. Following positive feedback, it was rolled out to those undertaking coaching and sport qualifications and the feedback was that this training was also valuable in this context, particularly for those working with boys and young men in a sport context. It is hoped that the course will gain a SCQF credit rating in the coming weeks and following evaluation to expand across the college and into other sectors.

Feedback

Wall Questions

44. Throughout the event, attendees were asked to respond to a number of questions posted on the walls in the main room. These were intended to allow input from attendees throughout the day and reflect on anything discussed within the workshops and presentations. The responses are intended to support SFC and EHRC in delivering the NEO work moving forward particularly in identifying areas of challenge or where further support could be beneficial.
45. Responses to the questions are outlined below.
 - How do we support a whole sector approach to equality, diversity and inclusion ensuring both the university and college sector have opportunities to work together?
 - *Need SFC to coordinate sector to take joint action.*
 - *Empathetic Leadership.*
 - What support do you need from SFC/EHRC to make progress on the NEOs?
 - *Leaders understand + listen to EDI Leads.*
 - *Funding for projects/support for the NEOs.*
 - *Ringfence funding for equality and reporting systems for data.*
 - *Fund our unis and colleges.*
 - *National and regional benchmarking data for the NEOs.*
 - *Standardise EIAs, policies, procedures across sector.*
 - *SFC make a video of student case studies explaining how disclosing info helped college support/make reasonable adjustments to aid their learning journey.*
 - *Establish cross sector working group and committee chaired by SFC/EHRC.*
 - *We need early guidance for statutory activity – clearer lines of communication more frequently.*
 - How can we share good practice in relation to NEO work?
 - *Teams Portal.*
 - *Case Studies.*
 - *Repository.*
 - *Events.*

- How would you like to be kept informed on NEO work?
 - *Through SFC regular updates (no preferred mode for these given).*
- What would you like to see happen with the NEO work past the April 2025 reporting deadline?
 - *Measurement framework shared and guidance on monitoring progress.*
 - *NEOs + Rurality.*
 - *NEOs + SIMD.*
 - *What is working? Where is the biggest impact(s) being made? Find a way of sharing this intelligence.*
 - *Further consultation and engagement with the sector to identify next steps.*
- What do you plan to do as a result of today's event?
 - *Clarify where equality sits in our college, what data is collected, who is involved.*
 - *Discuss internally with colleagues and identify how our work can support NEOs.*
- How do we work together to keep up momentum of the NEO work past the April 2025 reporting deadline?
 - *More in person networking.*
 - *Have a session at the end of the reporting cycle to share challenges, good practice, learning.*
 - *More regular interactions and dialogue between FE/HE sector and SFC +EHRC + SG (Scottish Government).*
 - *More events.*
 - *More workshops.*
 - *More webinars.*

Event Evaluation

46. Attendees were asked to complete an evaluation form following the event to provide SFC and EHRC with feedback. The evaluation form had 29 responses, with the majority of respondents finding the presentations and workshops throughout the day somewhat or very relevant.
47. Areas to improve on that were highlighted through the event and the evaluation form included:
- Diversity of presenters throughout the day.
 - Having student-led presentations and student focussed workshops.
 - Publishing the NEO Measurement Framework and guidance for the April 2025 PSED reporting cycle as soon as possible.

- Mixing up the workshop rooms so attendees could collaborate with different attendees throughout the day.
- Microphone/sound accessibility throughout the event.
- Overall, attendees were satisfied with the venue, Stirling Court Hotel, and the catering provided.

Next Steps

48. The aim of the event was to bring together key sector stakeholders, including equality leads, student representatives and sector agencies, to discuss the National Equality Outcomes, progress made to date and how we can work together to make impact. The event was also an opportunity for those stakeholders to come together to network and share good practice.
49. Going forward, the SFC and EHRC will focus on the following areas to provide support to the sector to continue working towards the NEOs.

Measurement Framework and Guidance

50. In the Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together Report, SFC and EHRC committed to developing a Measurement Framework to support institutions in measuring progress and success against the NEOs. SFC and EHRC have been working on several projects detailed below to support institutions in measuring progress.
51. SFC have been working with internal colleagues to collate equality data. This has enabled SFC colleagues to see what equality data is available to institutions and where institutional contacts should be able to access the data. SFC are now finalising an external facing document that maps this information and will support institutions in interpreting equality data in a way that will help them measure progress against the NEOs. This will be published during Autumn 2024.
52. Institutions are encouraged to set institutional baselines for the NEOs that will be, or have been, adopted. This will enable institutions to measure progress year on year. Institutions are reminded that where they do not feel a NEO is relevant to their institution, they must evidence why they are not adopting it in their Public Sector Equality Duty report.
53. SFC and EHRC will review institutional PSED reports after the next reporting deadline in April 2025 and consider the progress made towards the NEOs. This will enable SFC to consider our own equality outcome (see below) and report the progress made. At this point SFC and EHRC intend to reflect on the progress made so far and the National Equality Outcome approach including input from institutions and students. This will enable SFC and EHRC to update our Memorandum of Understanding and outline the next phase of our strategic partnership which will include next steps for institutions on measuring progress from their baselines.

The tertiary system will make progress on the National Equality Outcomes through our support, monitoring and reporting.

54. As detailed below, SFC and EHRC will conduct two thematic reviews that will support the sector in reporting on NEOs identified to have data gaps.

Thematic Reviews

55. After consideration of feedback provided during the event, SFC and EHRC will initially be moving forward with the topics of ‘feeling of safety/sense of belonging for students’ and ‘staff representation’.
56. The concept of ‘safety’ and the need for clear definitions was highlighted as a challenge by multiple attendees. There are four NEOs specifically linked to feelings of safety (disability, race, gender reassignment and sexual orientation), while there are another two NEOs linked to staff and students having confidence in reporting mechanisms (sex and religion and belief). There are challenges around consistent data collection in this area, with attendees noting it would be useful to have information of this type recorded nationally (e.g. NSS). The original data supporting the development of the NEOs particularly for sexual orientation and gender reassignment was from Stonewall research, which has not been repeated.
57. In discussions of safety and the wording of the NEOs, this is framed in terms of a sense of belonging with students and staff feeling safe on campus and as part of the institution. Building on the work of WonkHE/Pearson [Building Belonging in Higher Education: Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach \(wonkhe.com\)](https://www.wonkhe.com/recommendations-for-developing-an-integrated-institutional-approach) could provide a useful frame of reference for the sector in terms of good practice, things to consider, where challenges are persisting. This would also seek to support a clearer definition and metric for considering safety within the context of the NEOs.
58. As outlined in SFC’s outcome for Student Interests, Access and Success: Education is accessible to students from all backgrounds and protected characteristics and, with effective student partnership, students are supported through successful pathways and routes through their learner journey. Students can prioritise their mental health and wellbeing and are part of a safe and supportive institution which allows them to engage and participate in the student experience. By conducting a thematic review of feeling of safety and sense of belonging, SFC and EHRC can support the tertiary sector in making progress on multiple NEOs and enable institutions to create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for their students.
59. Draft questions for the review:
 - How do we define and measure safety in relation to the NEOs?
 - Does institutional strategy translate into practice?
 - What features of a campus enable students to feel safe?
60. Colleagues also identified the challenge of staff representation as another area where further insights could be beneficial. In discussions around data – attendees noted the challenges of gathering accurate data, particularly when relying on self-declarations of protected characteristics by staff. Attendees also raised how local geography has posed a challenge in staff recruitment and retention.
61. There are two NEOs which specifically mention staff representation: ‘Where representation is not proportionate to the relevant population, increase the racial diversity of teaching and non-teaching staff to align with student representation in the sector.’ and ‘Where representation is not proportionate to the relevant population, increase the representation of disabled staff in the workforce and on college Boards and university Courts.’
62. In terms of mainstreaming equality within tertiary education in Scotland there remains work to be done to ensure fair opportunities for all and supporting a diversity of voices in staffing within

institutions. This also links to the pay gap reporting within PSED and the challenges of course gender balance. It is important that all learners feel empowered and welcome in our institutions and a key part of that is a diverse staff body. The UUK report [Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic student attainment at UK Universities: #CLOSINGTHEGAP](#) (2021) stated, 'Having low numbers of BAME staff has been identified as limiting an institution's capability to address the attainment gap. It can mean that BAME staff become overburdened with the responsibility of acting as role models and mentors, and this can also create a perception that the responsibility for addressing the attainment gap and related issues does not fall to other members of staff.' This was also reflected in the Unite [Living Black at University Report](#) (2022) which stated, 'Where staff doesn't reflect student diversity, this can lead to Black students not coming forward for help or support.' This reiterates the importance of supporting diverse staffing within institutions as a key to facilitating success for all.

63. SFC are planning how these thematic reviews will be conducted and will contact sector stakeholders to engage with them in the coming months.

Leadership Sessions

64. The Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together report (2023) set out next steps for NEO work including '*Offer development sessions to leadership groups in the sector*', an ask which was driven by sector colleagues. The leadership session workshop was designed to help us develop our understanding of sector needs in this space.
65. Attendees wanted the sessions to include reinforcement on the importance of mainstreaming EDI within an institution alongside the statutory obligations and other reporting obligations. There was no consensus in terms of preferred mode of delivery. Multiple groups identified case studies and real-life examples as an impactful way to convey the importance of EDI.
66. The feedback from this session included that sessions should be mandatory for all institutions and should be led by SFC and EHRC to encourage accountability and buy in from senior staff (including emphasising the statutory nature of this work and regulatory mechanisms). The comments from the session indicated a wider challenge of mainstreaming EDI and further efforts needed to ensure institutions are moving forward on their commitments to the NEOs.
67. There was a desire from attendees to raise the profile of the NEOs and PSED duties with senior leads within institutions. This included requests for events with sector bodies (Universities Scotland and Colleges Scotland) and for sessions with specific institutional and regional focus including lived experience to tangibly show impact of this work.
68. SFC and EHRC intend to enter discussions with sector agencies/groups to explore opportunities to deliver leadership sessions.

Ongoing Support

69. SFC and EHRC will publish reporting guidance for the April 2025 PSED report in relation to the NEOs in Autumn 2024. The reporting guidance will be published alongside the equality data tool mentioned in paragraph 50.
70. A video summary of the event is located on SFC's website, this also includes case studies from the institutions that shared their work at the NEOs event. If you are aware of good practice happening in the equality space at your institution and would like to share this with the sector, please contact efulton@sfc.ac.uk.

Annex A - Agenda



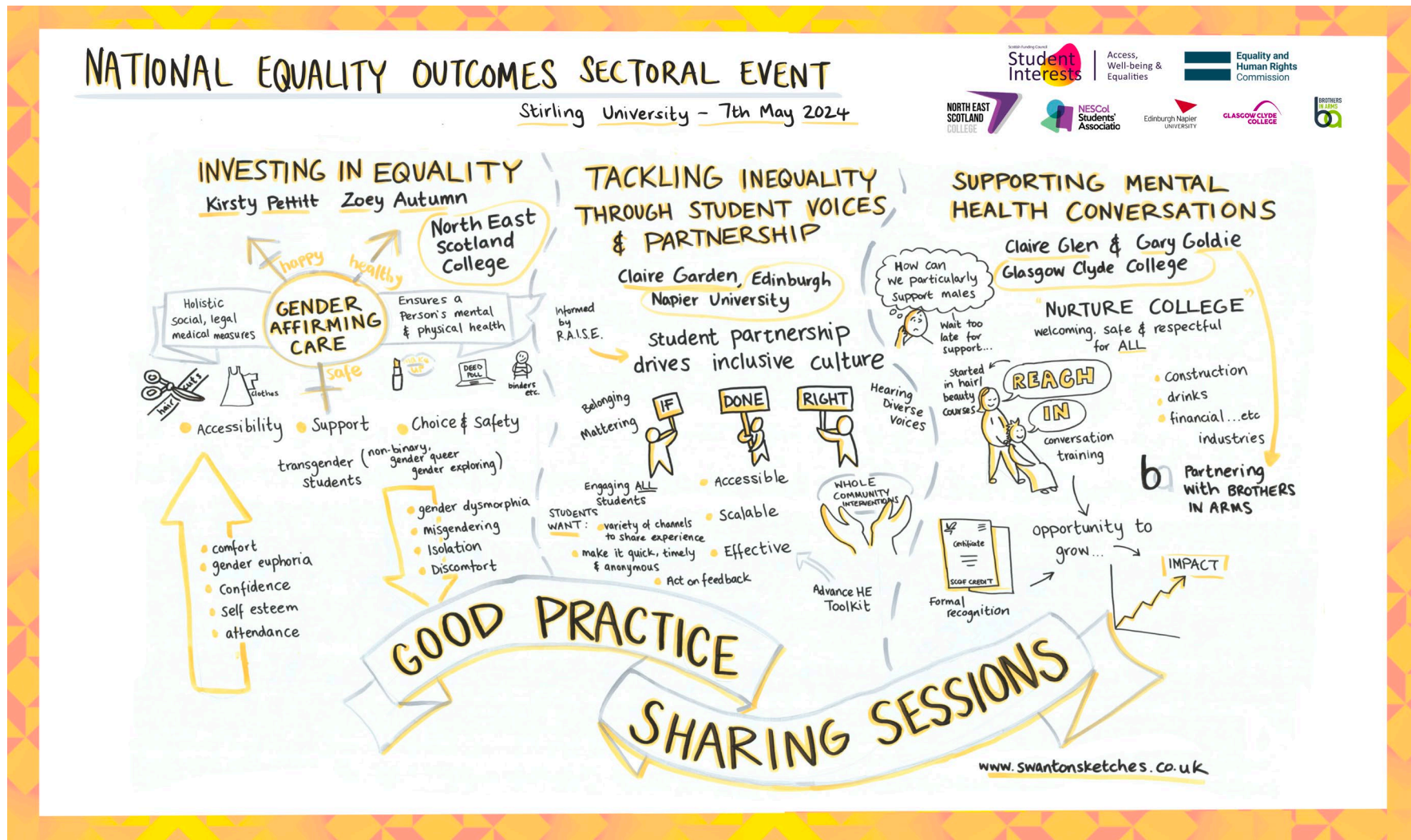
Access,
Well-being &
Equalities



NEO National Event Agenda – Stirling Court Hotel, University of Stirling

Agenda Item	Time	Speaker	Room
Registration: Arrival, registration, refreshments	9:30-9:55	N/A	Wooden Wall 1 Silver Glen (Refreshments)
Welcome	10:00-10:15	Karen Watt, Chief Executive, Scottish Funding Council & John Wilkes, Head of Scotland, Equality and Human Rights Commission	Blair Atholl
National Equality Outcomes Update	10:15-10:30	Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl
Scottish Government Public Sector Equality Duty Improvement Activity Update	10:30-10:45	Jenny Kemp, Policy & Engagement Team Leader, Mainstreaming and Inclusion Division, Scottish Government	Blair Atholl
Equality and Human Rights Commission Update	10:45-11:00	Equality and Human Rights Commission	Blair Atholl
Comfort Break	11:00-11:10		
Workshop 1: Thematic Reviews Scoping Exercise	11:10-11:50	Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl Erksine Fintry Callander Dollar
Changeover	11:50-11:55		
Student Engagement in Equality	11:55-12:15	Erica Russell-Hensens, Deputy-Director, Student Interests Access and Quality, Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl
Lunch and Networking	12:15-13:15		Restaurant
Workshops 2: Developing Leadership Sessions	13:15-13:45	Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl Erksine Fintry Callander Dollar
Changeover	13:45-13:50		
Workshop 3: Meaningful Action Planning	13:50-14:20	Equality and Human Rights Commission	Blair Atholl
Tea and Coffee Networking Break	14:20-14:40		Silver Glen
Good Practice Sharing Presentations	14:40-15:10	Institutional Leads	Blair Atholl
Workshop Sharing session	15:10-15:50	Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl
Rounding-Up, Next steps, Closing Remarks	15:50-16:00	Scottish Funding Council	Blair Atholl

Annex B – Swanton Sketches



NATIONAL EQUALITY OUTCOMES SECTORAL EVENT

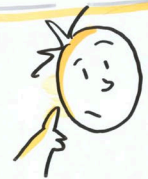
Stirling University - 7th May 2024



Access, Well-being & Equalities



THEMATIC REVIEWS



No Obvious Consensus?

complexity?

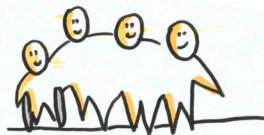
Physical safety?

emotional safety?

What does SAFE mean?

Where does Poverty fit?

link to Widening participation Social deprivation?



How to ensure Space for student VOICES



Is there TRUST in data?

Representation Performing less Well in interviews?

Who is missing?



Need lived experiences

Empowering EDI practitioners



Help senior leadership with discomfort

COMFORT ZONE



meaningful change addressing discomfort

Plan from the outset

LEADERSHIP

www.swantonsketches.co.uk

Annex C – Workshop Prompts

Thematic Reviews Workshop

1. As part of the Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together report, SFC and EHRC committed to developing thematic reviews to inform and direct improvement on the National Equality Outcomes. We would like to hear from institutions and external agencies where they would like these reviews to focus and what would benefit the sector the most to drive forward progress on the outcomes.

Prompt Questions

- Which National Equality Outcome areas do you feel could benefit from a thematic review? Are these areas more general (protected characteristics) or more specific (feelings of safety, access to support, etc)?
- Do you know how/where to access equality data from your institution? How easy is it to access this data? Do you feel equipped to use this data to measure progress against the NEOs? What are the gaps in equality data available to your institution?
- What type of data that you do not have access to would be useful to help you make progress against the NEOs?
- Which NEO/ equality area is the most challenging for your institution? Why is it challenging?
- Who should be involved in the thematic reviews? Should they be conducted internally by SFC or commissioned?
- Are there particular areas where the sector could benefit from further support outwith thematic reviews? What does that support look like?

Leadership Workshop

As part of the Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together report, SFC and EHRC committed to developing leadership sessions for senior leaders in the sector off the back of feedback received from stakeholders. We would like to take the opportunity to hear from sector stakeholders including staff and students from institutions and external agencies on what they would like the content of the leadership sessions to include and how they would like them to be rolled out.

Prompt Questions

- Who do you define as leaders in your institutions? What do you need from institutional leaders in relation to the NEOs?
- Who leads on NEO/Equality work in your institution? Who do you think should lead on NEOs within your organisation?
- What do you think the leadership sessions on the NEOs should involve? What does a session look like?
- What are the top topics you would like to include in the leadership sessions?
- What other stakeholders should be consulted in the process of creating the leadership sessions?
- Who should the leadership sessions be rolled out to? Should they be optional? How can we monitor and report on uptake?
- How should the leadership sessions be delivered? By SFC/EHRC? By the institution? Online/in-person?
- What would you like to see to support institutional buy-in on this work? What are the institutional barriers to progress with NEOs? How do we achieve the most impact from these sessions?