Student Interests

National Equality Outcomes Sector Summary Report 2025

Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

Equality and Human Rights Commission | Scotland

National Equality Outcomes Sector Summary Report 2025

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Summary: The report summarises the tertiary sector's commitment and progress toward achieving the National Equality Outcomes and is informed by institutional Public Sector Equality Duty reports.

FAO: Equality Leads of Scotland's colleges and universities, and the general public.

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Executive Summary

1. As part of the ongoing commitment by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to support Scotland's colleges and universities in tackling the most persistent inequalities faced by staff and students, a review of the latest Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) reports was conducted over summer 2025. This review considered the tertiary sector's approach to adopting and making progress towards achieving the National Equality Outcomes (NEOs).

2. Overall SFC and EHRC are extremely pleased to see there has been strong alignment between the goals set out in the institutional PSED reports to the NEOs. Institutions have, in some cases, contextualised the NEOs by altering wording or capturing multiple NEOs under broader institutional outcomes.

3. Only four institutions have not made any reference to the NEOs, with one of those institutions currently lacking a published PSED report. SFC and EHRC recognise that although some of these institutions do not explicitly reference the NEOs, their Equality Outcomes often still align with themes of the NEOs. Three of these institutions have been contacted by SFC to offer further support and have expressed a commitment to being more explicit in the adoption of the NEOs in future reports. EHRC are following up an issue of non-compliance with the other institution. It is important to note that numbers and data used throughout this report are representative of a snapshot in time when the review was conducted during 2025. We are aware that some institutions have made updates to their PSED reports since the review took place.

4. This report captures a significant range of good practice that evidences progress towards achieving the NEOs. This includes gathering qualitative data from staff and students to understand experience, developing and implementing strategies, offering training opportunities, and much more. SFC and EHRC will work closely with institutional equality leads to share this work further.

Introduction

Background

5. SFC and 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 incorporated an action dedicated to investigating the persistent inequalities in the sector.

6. A key priority in the EHRC/SFC action plan was to identify 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.

7. 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 (RoWA.)

8. 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.

9. Within the 2023 report, institutions were asked to acknowledge the NEOs and begin to think how they will work towards achieving them. As part of the ongoing support SFC and EHRC provide to the sector regarding the NEOs, the [National Equality Outcomes Data and Reporting Guidance - Scottish Funding Council](#) was published in November 2024 and set out the expectations for adopting and reporting on the NEOs in the upcoming Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) reporting cycle (April 2025). The PSED is applicable to 43 tertiary education institutions across Scotland.

10. SFC and EHRC are aware that not all institutions will progress every NEO. This could be due to resource, capacity issues or local evidence demonstrating that a particular NEO is not relevant to an institution. Where this is the case, institutions were asked to outline in their PSED report why they are not progressing a particular NEO(s) and their plan for how they will continue to monitor and consider evidence to continue to review the

relevance of the NEOs. This publication sets out the key findings from the joint SFC and EHRC review of institutional PSED reports published in April 2025. Throughout this report where examples of good practice are cited the relevant institution has been named, this has been done to support the sharing of good practice and future collaboration.

Legal Framework

11. The purpose of The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (as amended) is to help public bodies listed in the Regulations in their performance of the general equality duty, which is defined in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010.

12. The general equality duty requires public authorities, in the exercise of their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

    - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010

    - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not

    - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

13. Regulation 4 of the Specific Duties require each listed authority, which includes SFC as well as universities and colleges, to publish a set of equality outcomes which it considers will enable the authority to better perform the general equality duty. It must publish a fresh set of equality outcomes within four years of publishing its previous set.

14. In preparing this set of equality outcomes, the authority must take reasonable steps to involve people who share a relevant protected characteristic and any person which appears to the authority to represent the interests of those people.

15. The authority must also consider relevant evidence relating to people who share a relevant protected characteristic.

16. If an authority's set of outcomes does not seek to further the needs of the general equality duty in relation to every relevant protected characteristic, it must publish its reasons for proceeding in this way.

17. An authority must publish a report on the progress made to achieve its' equality outcomes every two years.

Approach to Adoption of the National Equality Outcomes

Acknowledgement and uptake of the NEOs

18. Through the NEO Data and Reporting Guidance, institutions were asked to adopt and

align to the NEOs in their April 2025 PSED reports. For the purpose of undertaking the review of the reports, institutions were separated by college and university status, and University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) academic partners were grouped into the university review. Out of 43 institutional reports reviewed, only four did not make explicit reference to the NEOs, including one institution that has not yet published a report.

19. Where institutions made explicit reference to the NEOs, this led to some form of adoption or alignment to the NEOs. Instead of adopting NEOs word for word, many institutions adapted the wording of the outcomes to reflect institutional context and priorities. This sometimes led to multiple NEOs being adopted under a broader strategic outcome for an institution. As outlined above it is understood that not all NEOs will be applicable to all institutions; where a NEO had not been adopted the institution was asked to provide the rationale for this decision.

Data benchmarking

20. Within the NEO Data and Reporting Guidance, institutions were advised that when setting Equality Outcomes, they should ensure these outcomes were SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound) to support measuring success and impact for those with protected characteristics in staff and student populations. The guidance set out the expectation that in order to measure each outcome they would need to set a data benchmark at the point of adoption. The guidance included a 'Data Identification Tool' which signposted institutions to relevant data sources for each NEO. The tool is not a definitive list, and institutions were encouraged to consider other relevant sources of available data (internal and external) to further support the development of this work.

21. SFC and EHRC aim to support institutions in addressing the NEOs where data is not as readily available. An example of this support is the thematic review of 'Feelings of Safety and Sense of Belonging' that SFC are currently undertaking. The thematic review will be a first step to expanding understanding of, and approaches to, tackling issues relating to feelings of safety and sense of belonging for students and staff as well as staff representation. By further exploring these topics, we hope to provide information and recommendations to the sector which institutions can use in developing their action plans and making progress on the NEOs. Findings of thematic reviews will be shared with institutions when available.

22. In regards to the NEOs with more readily available data sources, data benchmarking seems to be consistently low across institutions. As this is the first report where the NEOs have been adopted, we are hopeful to see more data included in future reports.

23. Where institutions have used data, this has been primarily focused on retention and success data or staffing data.

Action Planning

24. Institutions have approached action planning in a multitude of ways with a varying level of detail provided. Twenty institutions have provided actions either in a distinct plan or have noted actions throughout their reports. Some institutions have committed to developing action plans which have not yet been published.

25. Action plans support the institution in setting the intended direction to achieve the outcomes they have committed to and have provided useful context in considering the mainstreaming report. It is helpful to understand how an institution hopes to achieve their ambitions in relation to equality and accountability for work being undertaken. Through both the NEO Sectoral Event and the NEO Data and Reporting Guidance institutions were encouraged to consider meaningful action planning in relation to achieving the NEOs.

26. Some institutions have referenced working towards a variety of charters to support achieving their Equality Outcomes and relevant actions. It should be noted that although some work towards charters has been cited as good practice, not all of the charters identified in PSED reports have been quality assured by EHRC.

Meeting the requirements of the Scottish Specific Duties (SSDs)

27. As well as meeting the requirement to publish a set of equality outcomes and report on progress, institutions have to meet the requirements of a broader set of duties defined in The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012. EHRC analysed the PSED information institutions published in April 2025 in order to monitor compliance.

28. Where potential issues of non-compliance were found, EHRC followed up with individual institutions to understand what had happened and to agree corrective action as per standard pre-enforcement practice.

29. At 8 December 2025, EHRC were still progressing corrective action with one institution.

30. As the primary focus of this report is on the NEOs, EHRC and SFC have included only top-level publication compliance rates for the other SSDs. EHRC and SFC will liaise with sector leads to agree the most appropriate channel to feed back the more detailed EHRC analysis of performance against the other SSDs. In summary:

   • Duty to report on mainstreaming the equality duty: 42 out of 43 institutions had published a mainstreaming report, equating to 98% compliance.

   • Duty to gather, use and publish employee information: All 43 institutions had published employee information, equating to 100% compliance.

- Gender pay gap information: All 43 institutions had published gender pay gap information, equating to 100% compliance.

- Equal Pay Statement: 39 out of 43 institutions had published an equal pay statement, equating to 91% compliance.

Age

The retention outcomes for university students aged 25 and over will improve.
The success rates for college students aged under 19 will improve.

General uptake

Colleges

31. Seven colleges have outcomes which commit to addressing the success rates for students aged under 19. Two colleges provided rationale for not taking forward this area by including data which indicated no difference in outcomes for younger students.

Universities

32. The majority of universities have adopted the NEO to improve retention outcomes for students over the age of 25. Where the UHI academic partners have chosen to adopt this NEO, they have also adopted the NEO relevant to improving success rates for colleges students under the age of 19. Where universities have not taken on this outcome, no explanation has been given, with the exception of the UHI report which has explained why they are focusing on other areas.

Data used

Colleges

33. Colleges have referred to internal data and metrics regarding student success rates to inform this outcome. There were references to longitudinal trends in success rates and also where success metrics have formed part of the college's strategic plans. Some institutions also referred to survey data which indicated that younger students have a lower sense of belonging to the college community.

Universities

34. Although the majority of universities have not included a benchmark for their retention data alongside setting their age outcomes, many have referenced that they will continue

to review and analyse retention data to monitor the progress of this outcome. Inverness College will also be reviewing student surveys to understand the experience of students aged 25 and over and 19 and under to improve their retention and success rates.

Key actions

Colleges

35. Some key actions identified in supporting this outcome include: working with staff to identify early warning approaches for students showing signs of struggling, activities aimed at enhancing belonging within the institution community for younger students and consideration of curriculum design and development to support younger learners.

Universities

36. Universities have identified application, enrolment and support processes that support students of all ages as a key action for this NEO. Some institutions are also developing role model and mentoring networks to support students aged 25 and above

37. Queen Margaret University specifically cites the development of a student retention strategy and also highlights how the widening participation strategy will be used to focus on and improve retention rates for students.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

38. Colleges are considering student success holistically and considering the wider student experience and factors which may impact this for younger students. Edinburgh College is one such institution who has outlined a range of actions they are taking to address to improve the success rates of under-19s. This includes reviewing the design and delivery of assessment, improving induction to ensure students understand course requirements to engage in study early and improving the participation of younger students with social activities within the college to enhance their sense of belonging.

Universities

39. Some universities are also considering retention rates more holistically than others, considering and analysing wider student experience and its impact on retention rates. University of West of Scotland (UWS) are considering programme level retention data and are also assigning an early intervention specialist for each school.

40. Inverness College has adopted both age NEOs and is reviewing reasons for withdrawal for students aged 25 and above and 19 and under to identify and address any trends. It is also seeking to increase the number of Graduate Apprenticeship programmes delivered to support adults to engage with education whilst working. For its 19 and under

students, Inverness College is also seeking to extend its pre-summer transitions sessions for senior phase programmes to support preparedness to study.

Disability

The success and retention rates of college and university students who declare a mental health condition will improve.

Disabled students report feeling satisfied with the overall support and reasonable adjustments received, including from teaching staff, while on their course.

Disabled staff and students report feeling safe in the tertiary system.

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.

General uptake

Colleges

41. Eleven colleges have outcomes or actions which seek to address the success and retention rates for students who declare a mental health condition.

42. Eight colleges have outcomes or actions which will look at disabled student satisfaction with support and reasonable adjustments.

43. Eight colleges have outcomes or actions which address feelings of safety for disabled staff and students within institutions.

44. Nine colleges have outcomes or actions related to increasing the representation of disabled staff within their institution.

Universities

45. Sixteen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have aligned to the Disability NEO to address the success and retention rates for students who declare a mental health condition. Some institutions have chosen to address success and retention rates for students across all protected characteristics.

46. Thirteen universities, including some of UHI academic partners, have aligned to the Disability NEO focused on disabled student satisfaction with support and reasonable adjustments. Some institutions have chosen to tie this into a broader outcome on student support.

47. Seventeen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have equality outcomes

that address feelings of safety for disabled staff and students within institutions.

48. Fifteen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have adopted outcomes which seek to improve the representation of disabled staff within their institutions.

Data used

Colleges

49. There was limited data produced in relation to the outcomes relating to disability. Two colleges referred to internal satisfaction surveys for both safety and reasonable adjustments. One college noted the challenge of disaggregating success data for students who are neurodiverse. Colleges published staff data, but this was infrequently referred to when discussing disabled staff representation in the context of outcomes or actions.

Universities

50. Universities, including UHI academic partners, have referenced using a plethora of data sets across the Disability outcomes. This includes student and staff disability declarations, retention and success data, student experience survey data and student employability data. Universities are also monitoring reasonable adjustment reports and disabled student allowance assessment to better understand what support students are receiving and their satisfaction with these services. Alongside this, universities are tracking the uptake of disability related training modules. Where universities do not hold specific relevant data in-house, they are monitoring National Student Survey (NSS) data for the question related to how well staff have supported learning and some have plans to include a safety related question in their staff and student surveys. For the outcome on staff representation universities are keeping track of staff declaration data and court membership data.

Key actions

Colleges

51. Some colleges are seeking to create a greater understanding of the barriers faced by disabled students and have committed to using internal information to address challenges to improve retention and success rates. Training and resources for staff have been identified both in terms of ensuring students are provided with reasonable adjustments and also to support staff and students feeling safe. To further enhance safety, colleges have set out actions including improving reporting mechanisms and focusing on campus culture initiatives.

52. Colleges have cited actions around developing and refreshing recruitment policies in their actions to address representation of disabled staff within their workforce.

Universities

53. Universities are committed to developing and providing training resources to staff and students to increase awareness around disability, particularly around mental health and deaf awareness.

54. Some universities are developing pre-start materials to support disclosures and mental health support prior to starting a course.

55. A few institutions have referenced continuing or developing their approach to trauma-informed practice.

56. Heriot-Watt University (HWU) has referenced developing staff training to support line managers in understanding team-based discrimination, harassment and bullying.

57. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) offers training and development opportunities that supports preparation for future board member applications to encourage a diverse applicant pool.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

58. Both Fife College and West Lothian College have highlighted that they have been awarded the Level 3 Disability Confident Leader Awards as part of the Department of Work and Pensions Disability Confident Scheme which recognises the efforts made by the colleges to attract and improve the experience of disabled applicants and help disabled employees remain in employment.

59. City of Glasgow College are looking to develop inclusive learning spaces as well as a sensory room which was supported by 98% students at the Annual General Meeting of the Students' Association in 2023.

60. Glasgow Kelvin College commissioned comprehensive 'Accessibility Audits' across their three campuses, engaging individuals with lived experience of disability. The audits identified barriers relating to physical access, inadequate signage, and challenging sensory environments. The college has installed improvements to address these findings.

61. Fife College was the first college in Scotland to offer 'relaxed graduation ceremonies', introduced by the college to support students with additional support needs, autism, social anxiety, or sensory processing difficulties.

62. West College Scotland highlighted the work of their Enabling Service which is available for those who may benefit from extra help or support while at college – either on an on-going basis or at key times during their studies. The Enabling Services provides bespoke, discreet, out-of-class support, and can help with areas such as equipment, training and assessment arrangements.

Universities

63. University of St Andrews will continue to work in partnership with internal and external service providers and professional bodies, including the NHS and third sector agencies, to ensure that its mental health and wellbeing services are appropriately designed and delivered, appreciating the diversity of need across their student populations. The mental health attainment gap is monitored regularly through their Academic Management Group who is designing further interventions with the aim of narrowing the attainment gap.

64. The Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RCS) is reviewing its advertising materials, placements and social media campaigns to ensure they reach a diverse audience during board recruitment. RCS hopes to attract potential applicants to its website to explore the role of the Board prior to opportunities being advertised. RCS wishes to create opportunities for individuals to register interest between campaigns to develop connections and/or relationships with RCS. RCS also wishes to change perceptions about who can be a board member and enable self-recognition as a potential board member. RCS will offer practical experience and training to prepare for future applications as a board member.

65. Heriot-Watt University is developing new Disabled Students Academic Adjustment Guiding Principles which will include legal compliance, internal procedures, reporting mechanisms, and expectations. This will be informed by group discussions on the updated 2024 EHRC advice note. Heriot-Watt University has also delivered transition events to support new students who have disclosed a disability, including a dedicated autism transition event that introduces students to the campus while it is still quiet.

66. As cited under other characteristics, University of the West of Scotland (UWS) is undertaking a piece of work to consult with staff to understand why they are less likely to have a feeling of belonging/safety at UWS. UWS will also identify a baseline of feelings of safety for disabled students via the UWS Student Union survey and determine any action required.

Gender Reassignment

Trans staff and students report feeling safe to be themselves in the tertiary system.

General uptake

Colleges

67. Eleven colleges have outcomes or actions intended to ensure trans staff and students feel safe within their institution.

Universities

68. The majority of institutions have adopted the NEO on gender reassignment or have an equality outcome that is relevant to protecting trans staff and students. Almost half of these institutions explicitly link their outcome solely to gender reassignment or trans experience while other institutions have created a broader outcome that is focused on staff and students with any protected characteristics.

Data used

Colleges

69. Student satisfaction and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) surveys were mentioned in relation to this outcome by colleges. Colleges cited internal staff and student surveys where individuals could report whether they felt safe within the institution. Colleges also included actions to increase declarations and reduce prefer not to say in relation to collection of equality data.

Universities

70. Where data has been cited under this outcome, universities are looking at declarations of trans status/history. Universities are also reviewing data from student and staff surveys where individuals can report whether they 'feel safe to be themselves' at the institution.

Key actions

Colleges

71. Colleges have identified a variety of actions to support this outcome including providing training and resources, improving reporting mechanisms and a focus on campus culture initiatives.

Universities

72. Universities are focusing on building and maintaining staff and student community networks, developing training and guidance to address harassment and abuse, and developing expected behaviours for their staff and students to create a welcoming and safe environment for all.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

73. Although North East Scotland College (NESCol) have chosen not to adopt the NEO on

Gender-Reassignment, it has provided information of ongoing work in this area. NESCol has the Gender Affirming Fund, active Trans representation, and involvement in the TransEdu network. The Gender Affirming Fund is granted to students to pay for services or activities that supports them as a Trans person. Feedback from Trans students has been overwhelmingly positive and the College has been recognised nationally for its work.

Universities

74. University of West of Scotland plans to consult directly with trans staff and students to understand why they are less likely to have a feeling of belonging/safety at the institution and determine actions to rectify this.

75. Inverness College is ensuring the development of representative gender categories for student surveys as well as aiming to include a specific question on feeling safe at the institution. Inverness is also continuing to enable staff to make their own decisions with regards to the use of pronouns in their staff email signatures.

76. University of Strathclyde convened a short-life LGBTQI+ Working Group to create a central online hub to provide a 'one stop shop' for information, signposting, support and visibility to LGBTQI+ staff and students at the university.

Race

Staff and students feel supported and safe and are confident that complaints of harassment or bias on the grounds of race will be dealt with appropriately because complaints procedures are fit for purpose and offer effective redress.
Institutions should also have regard to attainment levels by racial group and ensure that their curriculum is diverse and anti-racist.
Where representation is not proportionate to the relevant population, increase the racial diversity of Court members and address any racial diversity issues in college Boards.
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.

General uptake

Colleges

77. Eleven colleges have outcomes or actions intended to ensure that staff and students feel safe and feel confident that any complaints of harassment or bias on the grounds of race will be dealt with appropriately through robust reporting mechanisms.

78. Ten colleges have outcomes or actions intended to address any inequality in attainment levels for students from a different ethnic background and to have a diverse and anti-racist curriculum.

79. Eight colleges have outcomes or actions to address the racial diversity of their boards while nine colleges have outcomes or actions to address the diversity of the staff (teaching and non-teaching) within the institutions.

Universities

80. Sixteen universities, including some UHI academic partners have equality outcomes that align with the Race NEO that aims to ensure students and staff feel supported and safe and are confident that complaints of harassment or bias on the grounds of race are appropriately dealt with.

81. Fifteen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have outcomes relevant to the NEO on attainment levels by racial group and ensuring their curriculum is diverse and antiracist. Some institutions have separated this outcome into two parts, and some institutions have only considered one part of the outcome.

82. Nine universities, including some UHI academic partners, have outcomes relevant to addressing the racial diversity of their Court members. Fourteen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have outcomes relevant to addressing the diversity of their teaching and non-teaching staff.

Data used

Colleges

83. Some colleges referred to staff data in relation to outcomes of representation, however very few cited figures. Some of this information was available separately in relation to pay gap reporting.

84. There were limited references to internal success data used by some colleges. One college provided data in reference to the attainment of students from different ethnic backgrounds from colleges.

85. One college referred to complaint data (one incident in 3 years) in relation to actions regarding safety and reporting mechanisms as rationale for not taking forward the outcome as well 91.27% of students agreeing students are treated equally and fairly in the 23/24 student survey The college noted that this will remain under review should the number of complaints relating to this area of work increase.

Universities

86. Some universities referenced staff and student survey data to measure whether individuals felt safe to be themselves at their institution. Where an institution does not

specifically collect disaggregated data on feelings of safety, some institutions have made plans to do this in the future.

87.   Some institutions are also using complaints data to gain an understanding of the confidence in their reporting and complaints procedures. In some instances, universities are also monitoring incidents that have been disclosed on the grounds of race.

88.   Universities are also focusing on how to improve disclosure of equality related data by staff and students through HR systems.

89.   Some have cited monitoring attainment and awards data in relation to race and addressing any disadvantage identified.

90.   Although there is not much mention of data in relation to monitoring how 'diverse and anti-racist' an institutions' curriculum is, a few universities have referenced future evaluation plans for inclusive curriculum.

91.   Universities, including some UHI academic partners, have referenced monitoring applicant data in relation to the NEOs on staff and court member representation. Institutions are also monitoring the disclosed equality data of their staff members and court members.

Key actions

Colleges

92.   Colleges have identified a variety of actions to support the Race NEO that relates to student and staff feelings of safety. This includes providing training and resources, improving reporting mechanisms and focusing on campus culture initiatives.

93.   Some colleges intended to provide support to staff and students to review and decolonise the curriculum where necessary and embed EDI initiatives throughout the college.

94.   Colleges have cited actions around developing and refreshing recruitment policies in their actions to address the diverse representation of staff within their workforce.

Universities

95.   In terms of staff and student feelings of safety and confidence in complaints procedures, universities are focusing on creating and maintaining safe spaces for discussions on racism and harassment. This is relevant to reviewing their report and support policies and procedures, developing specific training on harassment and other types of inappropriate behaviour, and monitoring staff and student experience data in relation to race.

96.   In relation to the outcome relevant to attainment gaps, universities are monitoring

attainment data to identify areas of disadvantage and creating actions to address this. Some institutions are aiming to look further back at the root cause of any disadvantage in attainment gap in relation to racial groups and making an effort to address this as early as possible. In some instances, universities are seeking to understand lived experience of Black and Minoritised Ethnic home students in relation to application and progression to better identify action needed to address attainment gaps.

97. Universities have shown a commitment to evaluating curriculum and strengthening their commitment to anti-racism.

98. Universities have shown a varying commitment to actions that address the outcome focusing on diversifying staff and court member representation on the grounds of race. Some universities are providing training to staff that take part in the recruitment process to help with unconscious bias. Institutions are also focused on widening the reach of their recruitment campaigns to a diverse pool of applicants. Some universities have referenced using the Scottish Government Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit.

Areas of Good Practice

Colleges

99. Forth Valley College's learning and quality team are engaging with awarding bodies as to the appropriate modifications of assessed teaching units whilst seeking guidance to upskill staff so they may diversity the curriculum. Data is being collected internally on staff confidence levels regarding the design and delivery of an anti-racist curriculum.

100. North East Scotland College is embedding anti-racist approaches across curriculum, staff development and leadership practices which reflects, supports and values the experience of all staff and students.

101. Glasgow Kelvin College host a 'Campus Bistro', operated by the college's hospitality and cookery students, serving as a welcoming environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can interact, promoting understanding and collaboration.

Universities

102. Edinburgh Napier University is creating spaces to elevate discussions around race and racism and spreading awareness and understanding of the role the University plays in addressing racism, including how they tackle incidents. It is also actively celebrating racial diversity by encouraging visibility across the community from undergraduates to alumni and role modelling in professional services. Edinburgh Napier University is also taking forward activities to support organisational anti-racism including elevating the voices of people with lived experience through staff and student networks, self-assessment and active anti-racism campaigns.

103. The University of Aberdeen has undertaken a range of work as it develops a 'University Antiracism Strategy for 2025-30. The strategy itself is being developed through

consultation with staff, students and Trade Unions. This includes a guide on 'How to deal with the disclosure of a racist incident' and analysis of its effectiveness. Alongside this is a continuing decolonising the curriculum project underpinned by a Decolonising the Curriculum Toolkit, while Race Literacy training continues to be delivered. The University is committed to evaluating the effectiveness of these activities. The University plans to continue engaging with its local partners through its Antiracism Roundtable, establishing collaborations with local Racialised Groups communities, and exploring ways to feed back in to the national work on antiracism.

104. Heriot-Watt University is utilising the Scottish Government Minority Ethnic Recruitment Toolkit and the BitC Race at Work Charter guidance as appropriate to make the recruitment process more ethnically inclusive. It also has plans to conduct intersectional trend analysis, every two years, of Ethnicity & Nationality to better gain an understanding of race specific impact according to national background. Heriot-Watt plans to roll out new EDI for Managers Training sessions, to better equip staff with line management responsibilities on understanding of team-focused discrimination, bias, harassment, hate crime and the EHRC Equality Act Employer Statutory Code of Practice.

105. The University of St Andrews has set behavioural expectations of staff and students regarding racism with the aim of embedding these expectations into the culture of the institution to reduce inappropriate behaviour towards Black, Asian, or Minoritised Ethnic (BAME) people.

Religion or Belief

Students and staff report that they have confidence in institutional report and support mechanisms because they are fit for purpose.

General uptake

Colleges

106. Ten colleges have outcomes or actions which seek to ensure that staff and students are able to use reporting mechanisms to tackle harassment on the grounds of religion and belief.

Universities

107. Thirteen universities have aligned to the NEO on religion or Belief to ensure students and staff have confidence in institutional report-and-support mechanisms because they are fit for purpose. Where institutions have not aligned, some have outcomes that support religion and belief outside of report and support mechanisms.

Data used

Colleges

108. Colleges cited various internal surveys in relation to this outcome including student satisfaction surveys and EDI surveys. One college also referred to the low number of disclosures/reports which had cited religion and belief as an issue as well as 96% of students reporting feeling safe at college according to the Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey in 2023/2024. The college noted this will remain under review should concerns increase.

Universities

109. Where universities have referenced data, this is in relation to the number of reports pertaining to religion or belief incidents or staff and student religious belief data. Some institutions are also reviewing staff and student survey data to understand the experiences of different religious groups as well as considering the addition of a specific question on religion and belief.

Key actions

Colleges

110. Colleges have identified a variety of actions to support this outcome including providing training and resources, improving reporting mechanisms and a focus on campus culture initiatives. Along with improving the availability and use of data to support this outcome, there is a focus on increasing disclosure of religion and belief within equality monitoring for some institutions.

111. Glasgow Kelvin College introduced Ramadan guidance for staff and students to accommodate fasting and prayer needs, including considerations around timetabling and providing appropriate spaces to support religious practices.

Universities

112. Universities are focused on reviewing staff and student disclosure rates of religion and belief as well as reviewing data from student and staff surveys pertaining to religion and belief to understand experiences and improve experiences. Some institutions plan to review their report and support mechanisms.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

113. West College Scotland has committed to having sanctuary spaces on all campuses

alongside having a chaplaincy team available at the Paisley Campus. It is looking to increase the representation of religions and expand this to other campuses.

Universities

114. University of Glasgow (UoG) is devising pre-enrolment material for students outlining expected behaviors to create a campus culture that does not tolerate harassment or abuse. UoG is also providing relevant antisemitism and islamophobia training in line with identified need and best practice approaches. Inverness College will include a specific question on confidence in reporting mechanisms (including complaints processes) in all student surveys they conduct. It will also continue to provide discretionary time off for religious holidays outwith the college calendar of closures.

Sex

Staff and students know how to access support about violence, harassment and abuse, report their experience and feel properly supported in doing so because the services are fit for purpose.
Institutions can evidence approaches that prevent and respond to violence, harassment and abuse.
Men (staff and students) know how to access mental health support (recognising intersectionality within that group).
Institutions will have regard to significant imbalances on courses and take action to address it.

General uptake

Colleges

115. Twelve colleges have outcomes or actions relating to their approaches to responding to harassment and abuse as well as that staff and students know how they can report issues and access support.

116. Ten colleges have outcomes or actions relating to supporting men's mental health.

117. Eight colleges have outcomes or actions to address sex imbalance on courses.

Universities

118. Eighteen universities, including several UHI academic partners, have outcomes and actions that align to the NEO that asks institutions to ensure staff and students know how to access support and reporting services for violence, harassment and abuse.

119. Nineteen universities, including several UHI academic partners, have outcomes or actions that seek to evidence approaches that prevent and respond to violence, harassment and abuse.

120. Seventeen universities, including several UHI academic partners, have outcomes and actions that focus on improving access to mental health support for staff and students. However, some institutions did not target their outcome on men's mental health but focused on improving access to services for all staff and students.

121. Thirteen universities, including some UHI academic partners, have outcomes and actions focused on addressing significant sex imbalances on courses.

Data used

Colleges

122. No data has been provided by colleges in relation to report and support mechanisms within the institution in relation to gender-based violence or harassment.

123. In relation to men's mental health colleges cited data on referrals and access to wellbeing and mental health services provided by the institution for male staff and students

124. Two colleges cited the courses within their institutions which have sex imbalances which they were seeking to address.

Universities

125. Some universities, including several UHI academic partners, have cited monitoring the nature of reports that come through their report and support mechanisms. Some universities are also using data from their staff and student surveys to understand the experiences of staff and students with protected characteristics and action where support provisions could be improved. UHI and Moray College will be adding relevant questions to their student and staff surveys to capture specific data relevant to the NEO on staff and students accessing support about violence, harassment and abuse.

126. Other than report and support data, no other data was identified for the NEO related to evidencing approaches that prevent and respond to violence, harassment and abuse.

127. One institution cited monitoring data on the use of mental health resources and how often they are accessed in relation to the NEO on men's mental health.

128. For the NEO on significant sex imbalances on courses, some universities are seeking to identify gaps in student recruitment and develop strategies to support improvement.

Key actions

Colleges

129. Colleges are seeking to address sex imbalances on some courses through promotion of all options available to students and through building on previous positive practice.

130. Colleges cited the ongoing provision of mental health and wellbeing services on campuses to support men's mental health as well as institutional mental health strategies and promotional activity to raise awareness of support available.

131. In tackling gender-based violence, colleges are working to raise awareness of processes currently in place for reporting incidents. Some colleges are looking to develop and refresh policies to ensure that they are fit for purpose. Training and resources to signpost to available report and support mechanisms is also being rolled out by some colleges. Colleges also cited work with outside organisations including local authorities and charities such as Women's Aid to address this issue.

Universities

132. In response to the NEO that focuses on staff and students knowing how to access support-and-report services based on harassment, violence and abuse, universities – including UHI academic partners – are committing to raising awareness of their support-and-report mechanisms, ensuring that they provide clear routes to report incidents and encourage reporting. Some institutions are also seeking ways to improve their reporting processes for harassment and bullying. A few universities have also cited their Gender-Based Violence (GBV) action plans or, where an institution is taking part in EmilyTest, they have cited their EmilyTest action plan. EmilyTest created a Gender-Based Violence Charter for colleges and universities. It is made up of five principles and a set of Minimum Standards, co-created with students, graduates, further and higher education staff, and violence against women and girls professionals from across the UK. Some institutions are also looking at ways they can promote GBV prevention resources as well as build confidence in their support offer.

133. In relation to the NEO that asks institutions to evidence their approaches to preventing and responding to violence, harassment and abuse, universities have committed to providing evidence of approaches that prevent and respond to GBV through their report and support systems. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland is planning to collaborate with its Students' Union, other institutions, organisations and relevant government departments to demonstrate how its work is part of the wider national strategy to address violence against women and girls. University of Aberdeen is working with their Human Resources department to identify where there may be particular risk factors in certain areas of work and are working with Heads of School to address this. Some institutions have cited gaining their EmilyTest achievement demonstrates their commitment to preventing and responding to violence, harassment and abuse.

134. In relation to the NEO that focusses on ensuring male staff and students know how to access mental health support, universities are committing to ensuring they collect data to monitor this and are promoting mental health support and resources at their institutions. Moray College is working to enhance its safe support spaces for male staff members. Inverness College is planning to provide mental health and wellbeing support sessions to male dominated courses.

135. In relation to the NEO on significant course sex imbalances, universities are committed to identifying underrepresentation and agree actions to improve representation at undergraduate, post-graduate taught and post-graduate research levels in relation to subject-level sector benchmarks. Some institutions plan to continue to positively support applications from the underrepresented gender in specific curriculum areas by applying a contextualised approach to admissions.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

136. Glasgow Clyde College has teamed up with Scottish Violence Reduction Unit (SVRU) and men's mental health platform Brothers in Arms to support those suffering with poor mental health. Bespoke workshops for students who will work with clients on a 1-1 basis were developed and rolled out further to include staff and students within construction courses. The 'Reaching in conversations' training course aimed at tackling male mental health stigma has now been credit rated at SCQF Level 5.

137. West Lothian College continues to run The Man Cave to encourage male students to talk about worries and mental health concerns. As well as running a twice weekly meeting on campus, the college has invested in games equipment for students to use when socialising.

Universities

138. Royal Conservatoire of Scotland's existing training on GBV and Consent for both staff and students will be supplemented by additional content to explore gender inequality in society and the impact of it on GBV.

139. As well as introducing a pre-matriculation module on GBV and Equality and Inclusion, the University of Dundee is also using a new online tool that records incidents and logs the action taken and support offered to students who have reported incidents of GBV.

140. University of West of Scotland will develop 'Inclusive Leadership' a self-paced E-Toolkit which includes content on sexual harassment for people managers. UWS will provide training for all line managers on Dignity and Respect Guidelines to improve colleague confidence in a 'zero tolerance' approach in line with their People Priorities commitment to 'develop our people and enhance performance'. UWS Senior Leadership Teams will undertake refresher training on a biennial basis to exemplify appropriate behaviours and

demonstrate how to act as active bystanders and allies. UWS plans to enhance engagement with the UWS Consent and Gender Based Violence Webpage through active signposting to this resource.

141. UHI North West and Hebrides College plans to strengthen partnerships with key organisations, including Police Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland and Women's Aid and promote training opportunities. It plans to continue to provide counselling for staff and students through either an in-person counsellor or virtual counsellor through Health and Mind.

142. In relation to the NEO on male staff and students knowing how to access mental health support, Inverness College plans to work with James Support Group and the Business Solutions team to provide a session on mental health and wellbeing to all male dominated courses in Construction and Engineering. It also plans to further promote its online resources about suicide and its suite of support. Inverness College will continue to train staff in Scottish Mental Health First Aid and to highlight the prevalence of male suicide during training. Inverness College will also establish the Dochas Hub to provide pre-start mental health and wellbeing support for offer holders aged 16-25 and prioritise young males.

143. In relation to the NEO on significant course imbalances, the University of St Andrews plan to prepare standardised equalities data pack for Schools and Units on an annual basis and the Head of EDI will visit Schools and Universities to present key findings and how the packs and findings could be used to improve course imbalances.

Sexual Orientation

Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual staff and students report that they feel safe being 'out' at university and college.

General uptake

Colleges

144. Eleven colleges have committed to having an institutional environment where lesbian, gay and bisexual staff and students feel safe to be 'out'. Some institutions held this within a wider outcome ensuring that all staff and students feel safe.

Universities

145. Twenty universities, including some UHI academic partners, have aligned to the NEO for lesbian, gay and bisexual staff and students.

Data used

Colleges

146. Some colleges cited internal surveys and metrics which indicate how safe Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual students feel within the institutions. Other colleges referred to other monitoring data including reports of harassments relating to sexual orientation. Some colleges have created actions seeking to address disclosure rates within equality monitoring data with initiatives to reduce the number of those who answer, 'prefer not to say'.

Universities

147. Where universities do not necessarily hold specific data on 'feeling safe' they have cited looking at staff and student survey data and staff and student disclosures.

Key actions

Colleges

148. Colleges have focused on providing training and resources for staff, supporting the development of staff networks and student groups to provide peer support, and aiming to increase staff disclosure within EDI surveys to greater understand institutional make up.

Universities

149. Many universities are focused on developing and fostering their staff and student networks as well as looking for other ways to visibly celebrate their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer plus (LGBTQ+) community. Some institutions are proving training and awareness raising materials to staff and students on LGBTQ+ matters.

Areas of good practice

Colleges

150. Fife College LGBT Community Group is working on the Safe to Speak to Campaign to support staff to be visible allies across campuses. Participating staff are trained in LGBTQ+ allyship to be confident in addressing issues brought to them. Over 100 staff have received training. The campaign is promoted to students and staff to raise awareness that allies are safe to speak to without fear of judgement or rejection.

151. Multiple Colleges have cited their ongoing work with the LGBT+ Youth Scotland Charter and progress within institutions to achieve charter marks at various levels.

Universities

152. University of Strathclyde has cited that they are working towards achieving Gold LGBT Charter award for student experience. University of the Highlands and Islands plans to promote and embed the aims of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI)+ Rainbow Mark.

153. University of West of Scotland has plans to consult specifically with Bisexual staff and students who would describe their sexual orientation in another way to understand why they are less likely to have feelings of safety or belonging at the institution and then will determine the required actions. UWS also plans to establish a baseline rate of feelings of safety of LGB students by June 2025 and determine action required via the Student Union survey. They will also seek ways to develop psychological safety so staff can feed into UWS policy and practice.

154. Moray College is also planning to consult with staff and students by survey to understand whether they feel confident and safe enough to disclose their sexual orientation. Moray is working towards LGBTQ+ charter status to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for both staff and students.

Lessons Learnt

155. One of the main findings from the review of institutional PSED reports focuses on the approach taken to adopting the NEOs. Most institutions have adapted the NEOs in some way to fit their own institutional context and needs. This has enabled them to focus on the inequalities that are most prevalent in their context. This is a positive finding that reflects the original intent of the NEOs and the approach to their implementation. Some institutions have said they will continue to keep data under review, so that the allocation of resource against specific NEOs is evidence-based. This confirms that the NEOs are being implemented in the flexible way intended.

156. Institutional approaches to data were also notable in their variation. Supported by the NEO Data and Reporting guidance, some institutions reflected on how they use current available data to prioritise areas of work for the upcoming cycle. Other institutions had noted that they were reviewing currently held data and are addressing gaps in the data to further inform work on the NEOs.

157. There were some scattered instances of student engagement with the NEOs, and these have been highlighted as good practice where appropriate. SFC will consider how to better support institutions to engage with their students in achieving the NEOs.

158. As noted throughout the report, the action plans have provided a useful opportunity for the institution to reflect their context whilst also committing to meaningful action. This accountability from institutions is to be commended and it is hoped that other institutions will also share their action plans once available to support the further development of this work.

Next Steps

159. We are pleased to see that the majority of institutions across the tertiary sector have either fully or partially adopted the NEOs. This is a step forward in tackling persistent inequalities for students and staff at Scottish institutions and we look forward to watching the progress made by the sector in the future. Where institutions have not acknowledged the NEOs, SFC and EHRC have reached out to offer support and encourage these institutions to adopt the NEOs in the future. EHRC followed up on any issues of non-compliance identified through their PSED monitoring process, engaging institutions to understand what had happened and directing corrective action as appropriate. As of 8 December 2025, EHRC was still progressing corrective action with one institution.

160. As part of SFC's Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM), SFC will be meeting with institutions to discuss a variety of topics, including equality. This review of institutional PSED reports will support those conversations and help Outcome Managers in developing an understanding of their institutions' approaches to tackling persistent inequalities.

161. SFC and EHRC intend to renew their Memorandum of Understanding and joint action

plan to reflect the current landscape of both the tertiary sector and best practice in supporting equality. The MoU will continue to make clear the commitment to supporting Scotland's colleges and universities in making progress against the NEOs.

162. SFC and EHRC will continue to work jointly with Scotland's tertiary sector equality leads to explore the optimal approach for leadership sessions, recognising the wider scope identified as part of the NEO sectoral event, including how this links in with the OFAM.

163. SFC and EHRC will also use the content of institutional PSED reports, including data benchmarks set by institutions to progress a measurement framework to support the next reporting cycle of the PSED.

164. SFC and EHRC will continue to review good practice in relation to the NEOs and will be in touch with institutions to gain further insight, through conversation, into how they have progressed initiatives. SFC and EHRC will use this information to create case studies and will seek to share this learning more widely with the sector.

165. SFC is in the process of conducting a thematic review on 'Sense of belonging/Feelings of safety' for students and staff which will support institutions in their consideration of multiple outcomes including those on race, gender, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. We are currently working with a range of student representatives as part of the review, and we expect to be able to publish this shortly.

166. SFC and EHRC are exploring how best to work with the sector to review the approach taken and progress made at a national level on the NEOs. We will continue to reach out directly to institutions to update on this area of work. EHRC has appointed contractors to undertake an independent evaluation of the NEOs, to better understand their impact in reducing significant inequalities and driving improved PSED compliance. This evaluation will also seek to identify areas where improvements can be made to the NEOs process and whether the resources, training and guidance to support the work are sufficient. The evaluation should complete in March 2026, and findings will be shared with SFC and institutions.

167. The Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy, published by Scottish Government, identified six key drivers to mainstreaming equality. The Mainstreaming Toolkit is structured around these drivers and may be a useful for institutions and SFC in considering the implementation of the NEOs as part of the Public Sector Equality Duty. As noted within the sector summary report, there are areas of development which institutions may want to consider which align with these drivers. These include developing accountability and transparency through action planning, using evidence and experience in identifying and prioritising equality outcomes as well as considering capacity, capability and culture for delivering ambitions.