

National Equality Outcomes Supplementary Reporting Guidance Note 2027

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National Equality Outcomes
Supplementary Reporting Guidance Note 2027

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Summary:	To provide information and guidance to support the ongoing implementation and adoption of National Equality Outcomes.
FAO:	Institutional Equality Leads, relevant stakeholders, and the general public.
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Student Interests | Access, Well-being & Equalities

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Introduction

1. In the Tackling Persistent Inequalities Together report, Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published the National Equality Outcomes (NEOs) alongside a series of commitments to support institutions in progressing with the NEOs and measuring impact.

2. Since then, SFC and EHRC have supported the sector through events, guidance, and the development of the first thematic review to progress towards achieving the NEOs. The first NEOs Data and Reporting Guidance was published in 2024 and helped institutions set and report progress on the NEOs.

3. Since then, SFC and EHRC have been pleased to see a high level of adoption of the NEOs by colleges and universities. This work has been summarised in the NEOs Sector Summary Report, an update of which has been provided in this guidance note below.

4. This document sets out supplementary guidance to be used alongside the NEOs Reporting and Data Guidance 2024 for the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) reports of April 2027. Institutions should continue to refer to the data tool attached to the 2024 guidance.

NEOs Sector Summary Report

5. SFC and the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) are encouraged by the strong engagement with the National Equality Outcomes (NEOs) demonstrated through colleges' and universities' Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) reports. The National Equality Outcomes Sector Summary Report 2025 showcases the significant commitment, effort and progress made across Scotland's tertiary sector in advancing equality and delivering against the NEOs.

6. Drawing on analysis of institutional PSED reports, which reflect data and activities up to 2025, the NEOs Sector Summary Report highlights the ways in which colleges and universities have embedded the NEOs within their own contexts and priorities. It demonstrates how institutions are using evidence and data to inform action, drive improvement, and support positive outcomes for students and staff. The report also identifies examples of good practice from across the sector, recognises progress in meeting legal duties, and highlights opportunities for continued collaboration and shared learning. Looking ahead, it sets out how SFC and EHRC will continue to work alongside the sector to support, evaluate and strengthen progress towards greater equality and inclusion.

Considerations for the April 2027 Reporting Cycle

7. SFC and EHRC are aware the next PSED reporting cycle will take place in April 2027 and for many institutions, this will be the halfway point in their 4-year reporting cycle for their current Equality Outcomes.

8. In preparing for the next PSED report, institutions are encouraged to:

9. **Measure and demonstrate progress** on the equality outcomes and actions set in their 2025 PSED reports.

10. **Strengthen the use of equality evidence and data** to better understand differential experiences and outcomes across protected characteristic groups, and to inform targeted action and evaluation.

11. **Engage meaningfully with students, staff and representative groups**, ensuring that lived experience continues to shape institutional priorities, actions and measures of success.

12. **Prioritise work that supports feelings of safety, inclusion and belonging**, recognising the role these factors play in enabling positive experiences, participation and outcomes for learners and staff. Institutions are encouraged to consider the recommendations set out in the Thematic Review on feelings of safety and sense of belonging.

13. **Build on examples of effective practice** identified across the sector through the NEOs Sector Summary Report, sharing learning and collaborating with peers to address persistent inequalities and common challenges.

14. **Consider intersectional experiences**, recognising that individuals may face multiple and overlapping barriers which can affect their sense of belonging, safety and opportunity.

15. As institutions continue to embed the NEOs within their own context, they may wish to draw on the Scottish Government Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Toolkit. The Toolkit supports organisations to move from individual equality initiatives towards a more systematic approach to mainstreaming equality and human rights across their work. This can help strengthen institutional approaches to identifying inequalities, engaging with affected groups, developing targeted actions and demonstrating progress against the NEOs.

Meaningful Action Planning

16. SFC and EHRC were pleased to see that the majority of institutions published action plans alongside or as part of their PSED reports. However, we would like to further highlight the importance of action planning.

17. Institutions' chances of achieving equality outcomes will largely rely on effective and meaningful action planning. When planning activity institutions are 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 prescriptive in describing the types of activity institutions might consider in order to further each of the three needs.

18. Institutions are expected to develop, progress and publish action plans for the NEOs they are adopting. As the NEOs form a part of the evidence set for the Student Interests, Access and Success outcome within the Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model (OFAM), SFC will monitor institutions' progress towards achieving the NEOs, and institutional action plans will be reviewed as part of this work.

19. Where an institution has decided to not take forward a specific NEO(s), they should continue to evidence why they are not progressing an outcome.

Use of Data

20. Institutions are encouraged to establish baselines for any NEOs they adopt, drawing on the data available to them. This can help institutions understand their starting point and track progress over time. SFC and EHRC recognise that institutions will use a range of evidence sources to inform their reporting and would expect a level of detail broadly consistent with that provided for previous equality outcomes. To support this, the original NEO Data and Reporting Guidance included a data table setting out available sector data for each outcome. Institutions are also encouraged to make use of their own local evidence and insight, including information gathered through staff and student surveys, to help build a fuller picture of progress and inform future action.

21. Good quality data can help institutions understand whether the actions they are taking through the NEOs are making a difference and support meaningful assessment of progress over time. Adopting recognised good practice in data collection, including principles such as data harmonisation and data minimisation, can help build confidence in the quality of data while supporting trust among staff and students who share their information. Alongside the data table provided in the original guidance, EHRC's Evidence and the Public Sector Equality Duty guidance offers a useful resource to support institutions in developing their evidence base and using data effectively to inform decision-making and continuous improvement.

22. As institutions work towards their National Equality Outcomes, they may find it helpful to draw on a wide range of evidence sources, including external datasets and publications such as the Equality and Human Rights Monitor: Is Scotland Fairer? (2023) and Scotland's Census 2022, alongside existing institutional and sector data. Combining different sources of evidence can help build a richer understanding of experiences and outcomes across protected characteristic groups. Institutions are also encouraged to engage with staff and students and to work with people with lived experience, representative groups and stakeholders when developing and delivering actions. Bringing together evidence, insight and lived experience can help ensure that action planning is informed, meaningful and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

23. Institutions may continue to encounter gaps in the data available to support progress towards their chosen NEOs. Where existing monitoring and reporting arrangements do not provide the evidence required, an appropriate action may be to strengthen these systems within an agreed timeframe. SFC and EHRC are committed to working alongside institutions to improve the equality evidence base and will continue to explore data gaps identified through the NEOs Sectoral Event. This will be done through thematic reviews that support shared learning across the sector.

24. In April 2026, SFC published the first thematic review regarding feelings of safety and sense of belonging within tertiary education in Scotland. This review included a desk-based review of currently available data and literature on belonging in FE and HE. The review also considered the views of students and highlighted good practice from within the sector to support progress on the NEOs.

25. The review recommended that institutions should establish clear measures of staff and student safety and belonging, use the findings to drive continuous improvement, and foster inclusive environments through targeted initiatives and support. Effective reporting mechanisms should be in place to enable concerns to be raised and addressed, with feedback used to further strengthen safety, inclusion and belonging across the institution.

26. The next thematic review to be undertaken will consider staff representation within tertiary education in Scotland and how institutions understand this through the lens of the NEOs.

27. In reporting on progress towards equality outcomes, balanced reporting is as important as clear reporting. Effective mainstreaming of equality is supported by honest reflection and evaluation, recognising both areas of strength and opportunities for further development. Transparent and evidence-based reporting helps institutions, SFC and EHRC build a shared understanding of progress and challenges, supporting collective learning and continued advancement of equality outcomes across the sector.

28. SFC and EHRC are committed to supporting institutions in meeting their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) obligations. Where institutions require further clarification on reporting requirements, colleagues at EHRC can provide additional guidance and advice.

Governance

29. Scotland's colleges and universities play a vital role in creating inclusive environments where all students and staff can participate, succeed and thrive. Within a wider legal and regulatory framework, including the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty, institutions work to advance equality, foster inclusion and promote positive relationships across their communities. Across the sector, there is a strong commitment to embedding these principles in policies, practice and decision-making, helping to create learning and working environments that are safe, respectful and welcoming for everyone.

30. SFC supports this work through its funding, engagement and assurance arrangements. As a condition of grant, institutions are expected to demonstrate alignment with the principles set out in the Codes of Good Governance for colleges and universities. Our Outcomes Framework and Assurance Model, introduced from academic year 2024-25, provides an enhanced approach to understanding how institutions are delivering against their responsibilities and strategic objectives including the NEOs. Through ongoing dialogue with institutions and partners throughout the year, we seek to support continuous improvement, share learning and maintain a proportionate approach to oversight. Together, these arrangements help provide a strong foundation for good governance, equality and accountability across the tertiary sector.

Tertiary Education and Training (TET) (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act 2026

31. The Tertiary Education and Training Act introduces new requirements for institutions to take action to prevent gender-based violence and to provide appropriate support for students and staff who are experiencing, or have experienced, gender-based violence. Institutions will report annually on their progress in meeting these requirements. SFC will work with the sector and key partners to develop guidance on compliance, including the definition of gender-based violence, with a formal consultation planned for 2027. This process will provide an opportunity to consider how this work aligns with and supports progress towards the National Equality Outcomes.

Next Steps

32. To support learning and continuous improvement throughout the implementation of the NEOs, EHRC commissioned an independent evaluation of the programme, undertaken by IFF Research. The evaluation draws on feedback from institutions, SFC, EHRC and other stakeholders, providing valuable insight into experiences of adopting the NEOs, their early impact, and opportunities to strengthen the approach going forward.

33. The evaluation report is available here and will help inform the next phase of support for institutions. A blog post on the evaluation can be found here. SFC and EHRC will continue to work in partnership to consider the findings and progress any support needs identified through the evaluation.

34. Feedback from across the sector will play an important role in shaping future activity, ensuring that the NEOs remain effective, responsive and sustainable. The EHRC, in partnership with the SFC, will soon be arranging webinars for institutions to come together to discuss the evaluation report findings.

35. This collaborative approach will also be reflected in a refreshed Memorandum of Understanding between SFC and EHRC, which will set out how both organisations will continue to work together to support colleges and universities in tackling inequality and advancing equality outcomes across the tertiary sector. We will shortly begin work on an updated joint action plan. This will be informed by engagement with institutions, to support delivery of the next phase of the NEOs work.

36. Alongside this work, the next thematic review, focusing on staff representation, will commence shortly, contributing further evidence and shared learning to support progress across the sector.

Further information

37. Please contact the SFC Equalities Team: equalities@sfc.ac.uk