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## National Equality Outcomes

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### Purpose

1. To update the SEAL Committee on a joint publication by the SFC and the Equality and Rights Commission (EHRC) on enhancing our approach to equality in the sector by addressing evidenced national persistent inequalities through a set of National Equality Outcomes. The publication can be found [here](#).
2. This paper will also discuss the next steps of this work including resourcing, monitoring and research.

### Overview

3. In 2019 the EHRC and SFC entered into a strategic partnership to explore mutual benefits to the organisations working together and, in the case of SFC, the sector it has oversight of. A [Joint Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MoU) and an action plan was developed, agreed and published in March 2020. This included a commitment to devise a set of National Equality Outcomes (NEOs) using an evidence-based approach to the identification of the most persistent inequalities in the sector.

### What are National Equality Outcomes?

4. 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 NEOs. NEOs are focused on action to address the inequalities which are evidenced to be persistent at a national scale.
5. The publication of NEOs report outlines the persistent inequalities in the tertiary system and asks institutions to address them by contributing to the NEOs as part of their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). The SFC and EHRC will jointly assess the PSED reports and consider progress.
6. The NEOs are provided in Annex B of the [publication](#) 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](#).
7. 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.

## What does this mean for institutions and the SFC?

8. More detail on how these outcomes were developed and what this means for institutions in relation to their Public Sector Equality Duties is provided in the publication. Prior to publication we (the SFC and EHRC) consulted with the Persistent Inequality and Outcomes Group who had supported this work. We also consulted with Equality Leads, Universities Scotland, Colleges Scotland and NUS Scotland.
9. A key benefit to the work undertaken with the EHRC to date as part of the MOU is that the persistent inequalities stand as a key source of truth in relation to the inequalities facing the sector at a national level and the National Equality Outcomes seek to address those issues. For this reason, the NEOs and associated reporting by institutions reduce or negate the need for any other equality reporting asks from the SFC or the EHRC e.g. in the Outcome Agreement. We are hopeful that this will also remove the need for any additional asks of the sector, in relation to equality matters, through Ministerial Letters of Guidance. Finally, this approach provides clarity to the sector on what the SFC and EHRC define as the persistent inequalities impacting on the sector at a national scale.
10. In relation to the SFC, this approach and our oversight role itself is now an Equality Outcome for the SFC and will be included in our Public Sector Equality Duty reports. The EHRC has praised this strategic approach which it describes as ground breaking and the first of its kind in the UK. They are also keen to showcase it and encourage other public sector organisations who have an oversight role of a key sector to adopt similar approaches.

## Reflections and next steps

11. Both the SFC and the EHRC are proud of this collective endeavor and it is a significant step forward in our commitment to work together as outlined in the [Joint Memorandum of Understanding](#). However, there is still further work to be achieved in three specific

areas. These are:

- How we monitor and report on the impact of the National Equality Outcomes at a national scale i.e. how will we know that progress is being made?
  - What areas do we need to provide more input on and how can we use thematic reviews (a key commitment in the MOU) to drive progress?
  - How can we support the sector to work together collaboratively with each other, the SFC and the EHRC to achieve the greatest impacts on the NEOs
12. We are developing our approach to working with the NEO's including considering the staff complement as well as exploring opportunities to secure project funding to progress this work. This is likely to also include paid student internships. Subject to the outcome of that proposal, the purpose of this resource will be:
- To develop a measurement framework working with our own and external datasets and evidence gained from lived experience.
  - To deliver a set of thematic reviews over the next two years to inform and enhance progress. Examples of what this could include are reviews and advice on 1) reasonable adjustments for neurodiverse and disabled students and 2) effective reporting and support systems for students and staff (both of which were key themes of our persistent inequality work).
  - To deliver a collaborative event to enable sector leaders including equality leads to share practice, their progress on NEOs and inform the two objectives outlined above.

## Recommendations

13. The SEAL Committee is invited to:
- Note the publication of the National Equality Outcomes.
  - Advise the SFC executive on any input and advice in relation to the next steps particularly in relation to the measurement framework to monitor national progress and the themes for potential thematic reviews.

## Publication

14. This paper will be published on the SFC website.

## Further information

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