



Skills
Development
Scotland

Equality Evidence Review

April 2025

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Key summary

The Skills Development Scotland (SDS) Equality Evidence Review highlights that individuals across the protected groups can face some of the greatest barriers in relation to participation and progression in the skills system.

- **Age.** Younger and older workers are more likely to face barriers and discrimination at work. Population ageing may lead to an increased need for the participation of older workers.
- **Care Experience.** The education system and labour market present challenges to how far Care Experienced young people can progress and flourish, alongside the wider challenges this group face.
- **Disability.** Disability has increased across the population for all age groups and disabled individuals continue to be underrepresented in the labour market at all levels. The number of young people reporting mental health conditions has increased.
- **Gender.** The experiences of girls and women in education and the labour market remain different to that of men. Occupational segregation, low pay, poor progression and underrepresentation remain an issue. Sexual harassment impacts on women's experience of education and work.
- **Poverty.** Poverty interacts with other protected characteristics to produce some of the greatest inequalities.
- **Race.** Minority ethnic groups face significant challenges of underrepresentation, discrimination and low pay despite better educational performance in general.
- **Sexual orientation.** Lesbian, bisexual and gay young people face significant bullying and harassment at school and these challenges can continue in the workplace.
- **Trans status.** Trans individuals face significant barriers in both education and labour market with bullying and harassment being a key issue.
- **Data availability** is a key issue in relation to understanding equality. In particular, there is limited detailed data in relation to disability, race and sexual orientation. The SDS Evaluation and Research team are working to address some of these gaps.

1. Introduction

The SDS Equality Evidence Review (EER) provides up-to-date evidence across the skills system by protected characteristics. Evidence is also provided on Care Experience and poverty, reflecting the broad definition of equality used by SDS.

The purpose of the Equality Evidence Review is to:

- provide the evidence that underpins the [SDS Equality Outcomes](#) and [Equality Mainstreaming Report](#)
- provide evidence for [Integrated Equality Impact Assessments](#) in SDS
- provide [SDS colleagues with up-to-date information](#) on equality, diversity and inclusion to inform their work.

The review draws on evidence from relevant statistical data sets and academic and policy literature. The focus is on Scottish evidence but draws on UK or international evidence where relevant. Where available, evidence on intersectionality is included, recognising that the interaction of different protected characteristics can create the greatest inequalities.

When reporting on the evidence we use the definitions used in the original versions of the data or document. We recognise that some of the terms used in relation to race, disability and sexual orientation are contested in the wider literature. More details are provided in each of the sections on definitions.

Evidence on the business case for equality, diversity and inclusion is available in a separate document.

Gaps in evidence are identified throughout the document and details on data availability are provided in each section. The SDS Evaluation and Research team are currently working to address some of the identified gaps through our research with [young people](#); [apprentices](#) and the [SDS PhD Programme](#).

Those across the protected groups face some of the greatest barriers and poorest outcomes across the skills system. This has been a consistent trend across all previous SDS equality evidence reviews. However, in producing this EER new trends have been observed:

- An increase in the number of individuals facing mental health challenges and the impact of this on educational and work outcomes.
- The increasing extent to which poverty underpins much of the inequality observed across the skills system.
- An increase in the reporting of harassment in relation to gender, race and sexual orientation at school, further and higher education and the workplace and the negative impact this can have on outcomes.

Intersectionality

The Equality and Human Rights Commission defines intersectionality as “how a combination of more than one protected characteristic can lead to or perpetuate distinct forms of discrimination or disadvantage”.¹ Intersectionality acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and inequality.

Protected characteristics can combine in a way that can create unique challenges for people with multiple identities. For example, a woman of colour may face obstacles such as discrimination because of her gender and race, she is also more likely to experience low pay and in-work poverty. This highlights how intersectionality can exacerbate inequality.

Intersectionality is highlighted throughout this document.

Method

A desk-based review of external data and evidence was carried out to produce the EER including:

- external datasets on education and employment
- government and policy reports; third sector research; and academic peer-reviewed research
- research carried out by SDS and the SDS PhD Programme.

The approach focused on Scottish data, referring to UK or data from other countries where Scottish data was unavailable.

¹ Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland (2023). [Equality and Human Rights Monitor Is Scotland Fairer](#)

2. Age

Key points

- Scotland's population is ageing with over one million people aged 65 and over.
- Young people starting out in employment and older workers tend to face the most labour market disadvantages and are more likely to experience age-based discrimination at work and in recruitment.
- Young people continue to be over-represented in precarious work.
- Multigenerational workplaces are becoming more commonplace with four generations working alongside each other for the first time.

Data availability

Data breakdown by age is widely available across social surveys and administrative data.

Further and higher education

The **participation rate** in 2024 for 16 to 19 year-olds was 92.7%.² For those in education it was 71.2% and 19.6% for those in employment; 3.7% were recorded as not participating (including those unemployed; seeking or not seeking work).

² Skills Development Scotland (2024). [Annual participation measure](#)

³ SFC (2024). [HE students and qualifiers at Scottish institutions 2022/23](#)

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2024). [Labour market in the regions of the UK](#)

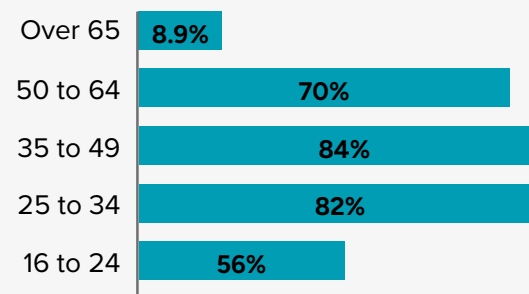
Younger age groups make up the majority of students in higher education in Scottish universities and colleges, with only 4% of registered students aged 50 or over.³

Labour market

Young people and older workers tend to face the most labour market disadvantages and may be more likely to experience age-based discrimination at work.

Employment rates vary by age group as illustrated in Figure 1. Those aged 16 to 24 are less likely to be in employment, due to higher numbers in this age group in education.⁴

Figure 1. Employment rate by age, 2024



Source: Annual population survey 2024

Scotland has lower **youth unemployment** rates than the UK as a whole – 10% compared to 17%⁵. Youth unemployment can have long-term negative consequences. Young people who experience unemployment face higher risks of future unemployment and lower wages over the long-term and can struggle to progress in the labour market. Long-term unemployment at an early age is also particularly harmful to young people’s mental health.⁶

The rate of economic **inactivity** of young people 16-24 not in full-time education in Scotland is 16%, lower than the UK rate of 19%. The main reported reason for inactivity in this age group is long-term sickness.⁷ Additional reasons provided for economic inactivity by those aged 16-24 include caring responsibilities and feeling discouraged from seeking work.

There was a 3% increase in the number of young people aged 16-19 starting a **Modern Apprenticeship** in 2023/24, along with decreases for those aged 20-24 and those aged 25 plus.⁸

A UK survey of over 1,000 young people of their experiences of **precarious work** highlighted that those aged 16-24 tended to enter precarious work as it was the only option but also use it as an opportunity to further their careers. Most young people surveyed wanted more hours work per week.⁹ Young people are more likely to earn less than the Living Wage, resulting in financial insecurity.¹⁰

With an **ageing population** in Scotland, extending working lives is seen as an economic necessity. Over 90,000 people aged 65

plus are currently in work across Scotland,¹¹ with this age group comprising the largest percentage increase in payrolled employees from 2023 to 2024. However, since the Covid pandemic, the UK has experienced an increasing trend where people aged 50 and over leave the labour market earlier than expected. Reasons for this include greater numbers retiring or leaving the workforce to look after family, or due to sickness and ill health.¹²

The **employment rates of individuals aged 65** or over has been increasing over time across the UK, from 27% in 2014 to 40% in 2024.¹³ Significant numbers of those in the 65 plus age group may have re-entered the workforce due to the cost-of-living crisis and high energy bills.¹⁴

Different **sectors** across Scotland show different age profiles of workers. In agriculture, workers have an average age of 48 whereas the average worker in hospitality is aged 35.¹⁵

Emerging evidence highlights the challenges and benefits of **multigenerational workplaces**, now that the UK may have four generations working together. Potentially workers born in the 1950s and 60s are now working together with those born in the 2000s. A focus on building age-inclusive workplaces has begun because of demographic changes, but policy changes remain in their infancy. For example, over 80% of UK business leaders report they have no company guidance on inclusive social events at work that include age as a consideration.¹⁶

⁵ Office for National Statistics (2024). [Unemployment by age and duration](#)

⁶ TUC (2023). [Jobs and pay monitor – young workers](#)

⁷ Scottish Government (2023). [Economic inactivity of young people aged 16-24](#)

⁸ SDS (2024). [Modern apprenticeship statistics](#)

⁹ CSI (2024). [Just a job? Balancing precarity, flexibility, and good work for young people in the UK labour market](#)

¹⁰ TUC (2023). [Jobs and pay monitor – young workers](#)

¹¹ CIPD (2022). [Understanding older workers in Scotland](#)

¹² ONS (2022). [Movements out of work for those aged over 50 years since the start of the coronavirus pandemic](#)

¹³ DWP (2024). [Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over](#)

¹⁴ RSE (2022). [Road to recovery: Impact of the pandemic on the Scottish labour market](#)

¹⁵ CIPD (2022). [Understanding older workers in Scotland](#)

¹⁶ The Work Foundation (2024). [Working together: Maximising the opportunities of a multigenerational workforce](#)

Over 50s can **face barriers to re-employment**. Evidence suggests that people over 50 who are made redundant are less likely to be re-employed than younger workers.¹⁷ For individuals who took part in redundancy support activities in Scotland, those aged 50 or over or under 30 were less likely to secure work following redundancy, compared to workers aged 31 to 49. Individuals over 50 were also less likely to secure a job with higher skills levels, increased pay or additional responsibilities post-redundancy compared to other age groups.¹⁸ Individuals' perceptions about whether their job offers opportunities for career progression increase from 25 to 49 years of age and then markedly decline for those aged 50 and over.¹⁹

Intersectionality: Pay and progression experiences of women aged 50 plus in Scotland

A qualitative research project interviewed 17 women aged over 50 working in the Finance and ICT sectors in Scotland to gain views and experiences of pay and progression. Findings included women being reluctant to pursue career progression or training opportunities. Women described structural constraints as barriers to progression, in addition to their personal wishes of not wanting to progress further. Women said they wanted to avoid stress and pressures they felt were linked to progression and that their capacity and desire for higher pay and additional responsibilities at work had reduced with age. In addition, women highlighted health concerns, menopause experiences and caring responsibilities as additional barriers contributing to them not actively seeking progression at work.²¹

¹⁷ Centre for Ageing Better (2022). [The state of ageing 2022](#)

¹⁸ IFF Research (2024). [PACE client experience survey 2024](#)

¹⁹ CIPD (2022). [Understanding older workers in Scotland](#)

²⁰ Age Scotland (2023). [The big survey 2023](#)

²¹ Scottish Government (2022). [Pay and career progression experiences of women aged over 50 in Scotland](#)

Older workers can face negative attitudes and **age discrimination** in the labour market from employers and colleagues. A survey of employees aged 50 or over in Scotland found that 23% felt they had experienced discrimination or missed out on opportunities at work due to their age; 11% said they had witnessed older colleagues facing age discrimination in the workplace and 3% had seen younger colleagues face discrimination at work.²⁰

Leaving work for those 50+ may have negative consequences, as research shows that being in work is generally good for health and wellbeing and rising poverty is a risk in this age group. UK focus group participants aged 50-64 who had left work due to a health condition said they would have preferred to continue working, but felt they had no choice due to ageism, ableism and insufficient support from employers or the NHS. A third of older people who had left work due to health reasons said that flexible working hours would be the most important factor if they were to try and return to work.²²

Around 40% of **self-employed** people in Scotland are aged 50 or over with the need for greater flexibility and making a career transition suggested as reasons for choosing self-employment.²³ Other research suggests more negative factors pushing older people into self-employment including age discrimination in the workplace and a lack of flexible working options offered by employers, combined with the increased cost of living and rising state pension ages.²⁴ Younger people are more likely to start new businesses, with older people more likely to own established businesses according to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor.²⁵

²² Demos (2022). [Understanding early exiters. The case for a healthy ageing workforce strategy](#)

²³ Scottish Government (2024). [Scotland's labour market insights: April 2024](#)

²⁴ Enterprise Nation (2023). [Almost half of self-employed people in the UK are over 50](#)

²⁵ GEM (2024). [Global Entrepreneurship Monitor](#)

3. Care Experience

Key points

- Multiple structural barriers mean that Care Experienced children and young people often do not achieve the same qualifications or outcomes as their peers.
- The number of Care Experienced students in further and higher education continues to increase, despite additional barriers to learning, including financial and housing problems.
- Less is known about the outcomes of Care Experienced individuals in the labour market. Evidence highlights that some are at greater risk of unemployment or being in low-paid and unskilled roles.

Definitions and data availability

While there are legal definitions for the terms 'looked-after' and 'care leaver', within SDS we choose to use the inclusive term 'Care Experienced'. In this report we use 'care leaver', 'look after' and 'Care Experienced' interchangeably depending on the definition used in the source data or research. By this we mean anyone who is currently in care or has been for any length of time regardless of their age. This inclusive approach includes those looked after at home, or away from home in kinship, residential, foster or secure care. SDS acts as a Corporate Parent to anyone who identifies themselves within this broader 'Care Experienced' definition.²⁶

Data on Care Experience is available at school, college and university level and for apprenticeships. However, small sample sizes can restrict the level of analysis. There is a gap in evidence on the labour market experiences of Care Experienced people.

Care Experience population in Scotland

Children's social work statistics show that in 2022/23 there were 12,206 children in Scotland cared for by their local authority – 1.2% of the under 18 population.²⁷ The most common placements are kinship care (34%), foster care (22%) and at home with parents (20%).

²⁶ SDS (2024). *Corporate Parenting Plan 2024-27*

²⁷ Scottish Government (2024). *Children's social work statistics*

School

Significant structural barriers mean that Care Experienced children have differential levels of attainment and outcomes from school.

Care Experienced children tend to obtain fewer qualifications at school, partly due to earlier school leaving age and higher incidences of disrupted learning. For example, at SCQF level 6 in 2022/23, 16% of those looked after obtained one qualification or more or better, compared to 58% of all school leavers. Evidence also shows that educational attainment varies across the types of accommodation in which Care Experienced children are living. Care Experienced school leavers looked after within the year who are placed in community settings showed broadly higher educational attainment when compared to those in residential settings. However, there is variation within these categories, and leavers looked after at home with parents had the lowest attainment levels of all placement types.²⁸

Care Experienced school leavers are less likely to go into positive destinations than school leavers in general – 86% compared with 96% of all pupils.²⁹ Figure 2 outlines the initial destinations of Care Experienced school leavers. The lower proportion of Care Experienced children going into higher education may be due to them leaving school at a younger age and having lower attainment levels whilst at school. It should be noted that the proportion of looked after leavers who leave school in S4 or earlier has declined substantially from 63% in 2009/10 to 34% in 2022/23.

For **Foundation Apprenticeships**, the proportion of individuals self-identifying that they had Care Experience has fluctuated across frameworks at both SCQF level 6 and L4/5.³⁰

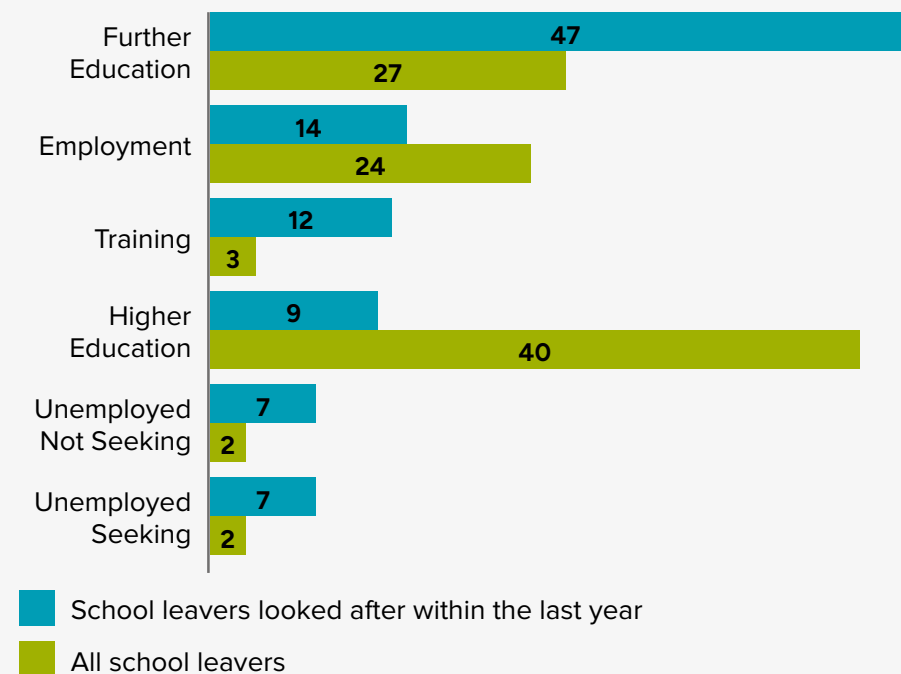
²⁸ Scottish Government (2024). [Educational outcomes for looked after children 2022/23](#)

²⁹ Scottish Government (2024). [Educational outcomes for looked after children 2022/23](#)

³⁰ SDS (2023). [Foundation Apprenticeship Report 2022](#)

³¹ SDS (2024). [Pupil Voice Research Equality infographics](#)

Figure 2. Initial destinations by Care Experience, 2022/23 (%)



Source: [Scottish Government \(2024\) Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#).

Pupil Voice: Care Experienced pupils' views on careers services³¹

SDS research on the views of pupils in Scotland (S4 to S6) highlighted that:

- Care Experienced young people were more likely to be satisfied with the careers services they received than those who are not Care Experienced.
- Careers advisers play an important role for care experienced young people with 76% identifying them as the most influential, compared to 59% of respondents overall.
- The most influential factors when deciding on careers for care experienced young people is the need to earn money (86%) and interests and hobbies (82%) this compares to 79% and 86% respectively for all respondents.

Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA): Care Experienced school leavers

SDS research with school leavers carried out in 2022/23³² highlights that:

- Care Experienced young people were highly likely to report that they were encouraged to explore a wide range of career options by careers advisers.
- Care Experienced young people were more likely to report that not having enough confidence in themselves and being discriminated against are barriers to their future careers.
- The top preferred sectors to enter for Care Experienced young people were health, social care and social work (21%); and art, culture, entertainment and sport (20%).

SDS PhD Programme: Care Experienced young people's transitions to successful adulthood

SDS sponsored PhD student [Elle Scott](#) is using participatory action research to understand and enhance practice in supporting Care Experienced young people in their transitions to successful adulthood. Elle has developed a research group with young Care Experienced people with the aim of improving policy and practice that impacts their lives.

For more information, please see the [PhD programme brochure](#).

Further and higher education

The number of Care Experienced students in further and higher education continues to rise. Figures from the Scottish Funding Council show that Care Experienced entrants accounted for **2.1%** of all **HE entrants** to college or university in 2022/23, up from 1.9% in 2019-20.³³ In the **college sector**, **4%** of enrolments to full-time HE and 10% of enrolments to full-time FE courses in 2022/23 were from Care Experienced students. In the **university sector**, **1.8%** of Scottish-domiciled full-time first-degree entrants in 2022/23 were Care Experienced (585 entrants).

Care Experienced university entrants are much more likely to be from more deprived areas. In 2022/23, 33% of Scottish-domiciled Care Experienced entrants to full-time first-degree university courses were from the 20% most deprived areas, compared to 16% of those not declaring themselves as Care Experienced.³⁴

Although the number of Care Experienced students has increased, some evidence suggests that they have lower success rates. There is a gap of six percentage points for retention at university and a difference of 16 percentage points for successful attainment of full-time college courses.³⁵ In addition, Care Experienced students are less likely to obtain a first or upper second degree and take longer to successfully complete their undergraduate courses.³⁶ They are less likely to be enrolled in STEM courses and are underrepresented in 'prestigious' universities. They are also less likely to secure graduate ranked employment, enter postgraduate education, and gain highly skilled jobs.³⁷

³² SDS (2023). [Young People's Career Ambitions \(YPCA\) 2022/23](#)

³³ SFC (2024). [Report on widening access 2022/23](#)

³⁴ SFC (2024). [Report on widening access 2022/23](#)

³⁵ Scottish Funding Council (2020). [SFC's National Ambition for Care-Experienced Students](#)

³⁶ UCAS (2022). [Next Steps: What is the experience of students from a Care Experience background](#)

³⁷ Harrison, N et al. (2020). [Employment and further study outcomes for care-experienced graduates in the UK](#)

Care Experienced **graduates** from full-time first-degree university courses in 2021/22 were more likely to be in work or further study 15 months after completing their course than those not declaring themselves as Care Experienced - 98.9% and 95.8% respectively.

Of those who successfully **qualified from college courses** in 2021/22, 92% of Care Experienced leavers from full-time HE courses and 91% from full-time FE courses with known destinations were in work or further study 3-6 months after qualifying. For those not declaring themselves as Care Experienced, these figures were 95% and 94% respectively.

Labour Market

Once Care Experienced young adults leave education, there is a lack of evidence on their longer-term employment outcomes. Routine data collected about the Scottish or UK population does not traditionally record whether adults are Care Experienced.

The number of Care Experienced **Modern Apprentices (MA)** continues to increase. The proportion of MAs self-identifying as Care Experienced was 2.6% at the end of quarter three, 0.4 pp higher than last year.³⁸

In 2023/24 Care Experienced MAs accounted for 2.3% of all new starts. The achievement rate for those identifying as Care Experienced is 59% compared to 72% for non-Care Experienced young people, translating to an achievement rate gap of 13%.³⁹ The SAAB report on making apprenticeships more accessible outlines how the system in Scotland could change to support more Care Experienced young people into apprenticeships.

The number of Care Experienced individuals undertaking a **Graduate Apprenticeship** remains low.⁴⁰

Care Experienced individuals in Scotland face challenges and disadvantages in employment and labour market progression. Many face setbacks in finding and sustaining career options in the early years after care, and for some this can continue into later years. Research suggests that Care Experienced individuals who are in work are more likely to be in casual or temporary employment, or low-level, short-term training and education courses. Care Experienced young people face several barriers while transitioning from further and higher education into the labour market, including poor support networks, mental ill health, unstable living arrangements and being unsupported for self-sufficient living.⁴¹

³⁸ Skills Development Scotland (2025). [Modern Apprenticeship Statistics](#).

³⁹ Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (2024). [How do we make apprenticeships more accessible and attractive to Care Experienced young people](#)

⁴⁰ SFC (2022). [Graduate Apprenticeship Annual Report 2022](#)

⁴¹ Sanders, R. (2021). [Care Experience and employment](#).

4. Disability

Key points

- The reporting of mental health conditions has increased in recent years, impacting on outcomes, wellbeing and productivity in education and work.
- Disabled pupils have lower levels of attainment at school and are more likely to go on to college rather than university.
- Disabled people face multiple disadvantages in the labour market, including lower levels of employment, lower wages and negative attitudes in the workplace. Labour market outcomes vary according to the type of disability recorded.

Definitions and data availability

Disability relates to individuals of all ages. It is defined by the Equality Act 2010 as “a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

The extended definition of ASN applies to children and includes disability. Children and young people are considered to have Additional Support Needs (ASN) if, for any reason, they “require additional support, long or short term, in order to help them make the most of their school education.” Additional Support for Learning Act (2004; 2009).

Mental health conditions are considered a disability and covered within the Equality Act if they have a substantial and long-term effect (12 months or more) on an individual's day-to-day activities.

At the UK level, data is readily available on the employment and educational outcomes of disabled people from social surveys. Due to small sample sizes, there is less data at the Scottish level or for different groups of disabled people.

The number of disabled people may be undercounted as individuals may choose not to disclose their disability. Furthermore, many people identified as having rights under the disability provisions of the Equality Act do not consider themselves to be disabled. Variations exist in when people are willing to disclose their condition.

Disability across the Scottish population⁴²

- The most common health condition reported in the census was a **‘long-term illness, disease or condition’**, by 21% of the Scottish population. This includes conditions such as arthritis, cancer, diabetes and epilepsy.
- The second most common reported condition was a **mental health** condition with an increase from 4.4% in 2011 to 11% in 2022. This was the largest increase across all condition types.
- The increase in the number of people reporting a mental health condition was driven by **increases among young people**. In 2022 15% of 16- to 24-year-olds reported a mental health condition compared to 2.5% in 2011.

⁴² Scotland's census (2024). [Scotland's Census 2022 – Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

School

According to the 2023 Pupil Census, 37% of pupils across special and mainstream schools have a recorded additional support need (ASN).⁴³ Of those with ASN, 57% are male and 43% female. Almost half of pupils with recorded ASN, live in areas of Scotland classified as some of the most deprived.⁴⁴ The number of pupils identified with ASN increases every year, likely due to continued improvements in recording and the range of definitions of ASN broadening out. The most reported ASN is 'social, emotional and behavioural difficulty' and the most reported disability is dyslexia. Pupils who are assessed or declared as having a disability account for 3% of all pupils at school. Of those assessed or declared as disabled 34% are female and 66% are male.

The Participation Measure in 2024 for 16 to 19 year olds identifying as disabled, was 89.1% compared to 92.9% of those identifying as not disabled.⁴⁵ Young people identifying as disabled were more likely to be in further education or training and less likely to be in employment or higher education than their non-disabled peers. Figures for 2024 show employment participation levels for disabled young people are at their highest since the measure was introduced in 2016, although still lower compared to those young people not identified as disabled.

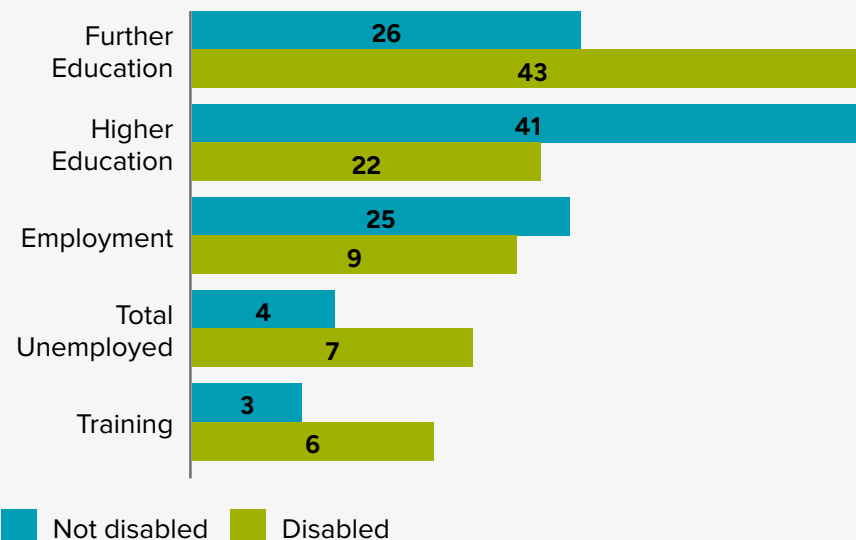
Attainment is lower for pupils who are declared or assessed disabled, and they are less likely to achieve SCQF levels 4 to 6 than pupils who are not. For example, 35% of declared or assessed disabled pupils obtained one or more qualification at level 6 compared to 59% of non-disabled pupils.⁴⁶

⁴³ Scottish Government (2024). [Pupil census supplementary statistics](#)

⁴⁴ Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020

Initial destination figures show that disabled school leavers from mainstream schools in 2022/23 are more likely to enter further education compared with leavers without a disability, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. School leaver destinations of disabled pupils 2022/23 (%)



Source: [Scottish Government \(2024\) Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations.](#)

Initial destinations also vary by type of disability. The highest rates of positive destinations are for those who are dyslexic (93%) and poorest for those with a mental health problem (86%). Young people who are autistic or have a mental health problem are most likely to be unemployed.

⁴⁵ SDS (2024). [Annual participation measure for 16–19-year-olds in Scotland 2024](#)

⁴⁶ Scottish Government (2024). [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#)

Figures for **Foundation Apprenticeships** (FA) show that 22% of FA starts (SCQF L4/5) in 2022 self-identified as having an impairment, health condition or learning difficulty, down 3.6 percentage points from 2020. Level 6 FA starters reporting a disability for 2021/22 increased by 2.2 percentage points to 20%.⁴⁷

The **mental health** of young people across the UK has received greater research interest in the last few years. As highlighted above from the 2022 census, 16% of those aged 16-24 report a mental health condition. A survey of over 3,000 school staff in Scotland reported that most do not feel well-equipped with mental health training to adequately support secondary school pupils. Staff felt they wanted more knowledge and understanding around mental health issues impacting upon school pupils as well as being taught strategies to support pupils.⁴⁸

Young People's Career Ambitions (YPCA): Disabled young people⁴⁹

SDS research with over 1,400 school leavers (with 225 responses from young disabled people) in Scotland on career choices, influences and motivations found that disabled young people:

- are highly influenced by their interests and hobbies for future career ambitions and were most likely to want to enter the arts, culture, entertainment and sports sector
- perceive barriers to future career development including not having enough self-confidence, a lack of work experience and not knowing the right people
- are twice as likely as non-disabled young people to say that discrimination would also be a potential barrier to their career development
- report parents/carers as the biggest influence on their career decisions, followed by friends and careers advisers.

⁴⁷ SDS (2023). [Foundation apprenticeships progress report](#)

⁴⁸ McKee and Breslin (2022). [Whose responsibility is it anyway? Pupil mental health in a Scottish secondary school](#)

⁴⁹ SDS (2023). [Young People's Career Ambitions \(YPCA\) 2022/23](#)

Further and higher education

At college, 23% of students at HE level have a recorded disability and 32% of students at FE level. Successful completion rates for disabled students studying full time in FE are lower than those of non-disabled students (61% compared to 65%).⁵⁰

At **university**, 23% of students entering Scottish universities with a Scottish home address disclosed a disability in 2022/23. This figure has doubled since 2013/14 reflecting improved disclosure of disability. The most frequently recorded disability was 'a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD'; the second most recorded is 'a mental health condition'. In addition, UCAS reports an 105% increase in applicants to UK universities sharing an impairment or health condition over the last ten years, with disabled students now making up 14% of UK university applicants compared to 7% in 2012.⁵¹

The number of young people reporting **mental health** conditions in the last ten years has increased. Possible reasons for worsening mental health among young people include: increased pressures placed on young people in both education and work along with service cuts are also suggested to have contributed to the decline in mental wellbeing; excessive use of social media leading to anxiety and depression and facilitating cyber bullying; the lessening of stigma around conversations on mental health may also have contributed to increased reporting of mental health issues by young people.⁵²

Mental health problems have a significant impact on young people's employment outcomes, with UK figures reporting that one in five young people with mental ill health are out of work, compared to one in eight of those without mental health conditions. Young people's educational experiences are also negatively impacted because of mental ill health, leading to a greater number of days missed from school and poorer exam results, impacting on their transitions to work or further study and training.⁵³

A survey of over 1,300 disabled students from UK universities found that while most disabled students reported positive attitudes from university staff, one fifth reported that a staff member had made them feel that their access needs were a nuisance or unreasonable. The evidence suggests students experience significant delays in getting adjustments in place from university disability services, with just over half of respondents saying that they had decided not to share their disability with their university due to overly demanding administrative processes.⁵⁴

Engineering UK⁵⁵ **reports that engineering and technology** subjects appear to be lagging behind other subjects in terms of recruiting disabled students to study in HE. In 2020/21, 11% of engineering and technology first degree entrants had a known disability, compared to 15% of all subjects combined. They report that despite lower participation rates disabled students still perform well in HE, with 45% of disabled qualifiers obtaining a first-class degree.

⁵⁰ SFC (2024). [Report on widening access 2022/23 - background table 6](#)

⁵¹ UCAS (2022). [Next steps. What is the experience of disabled students in education](#)

⁵² The Health Foundation (2024). [We've only just begun](#)

⁵³ The Health Foundation (2024). [We've only just begun](#)

⁵⁴ Access Insights (2023). [Disabled students UK: Access insights report 2023](#)

⁵⁵ Engineering UK (2023). [Engineering in Higher Education](#)

While **degree results** are similar for disabled and non-disabled students,⁵⁶ disabled graduates across the UK face a persistent employment gap and are less likely to be in employment 15 months post-graduation than non-disabled graduates. However, graduate outcomes depend on the type of disability reported, with those with specific learning difficulties (including dyslexia and ADHD) having higher levels of full-time employment than graduates with no known disability.⁵⁷ Autistic graduates experience the lowest level of full-time employment after finishing university, regardless of their qualification level. For disabled graduates, the disability pay gap continues, with disabled graduates from Scottish HEIs earning £29,200 compared to those with no known disability earning £31,800 when surveyed five years post-graduation. Disabled female graduates also reported lower earnings than disabled men.⁵⁸

Labour market

Disabled people face multiple disadvantages in the UK labour market, including lower levels of employment, lower wages, fewer hours, precarious contracts and negative attitudes in the workplace.

The proportion of disabled people undertaking an MA continues to increase from a low of 13% during the pandemic (2020/21). The percentage of **Modern Apprenticeship** starters identifying as disabled in 2023/24 was 17%, 1.7 percentage points higher than the same point the previous year. The most common disability types identified by MA starters are specific learning difficulty and mental health, with mental health issues increasing to 23% up from 21% in 2022/23. Achievement rates for disabled MAs have improved over the last three years but continue to be lower than for non-disabled MAs, with the current achievement gap being 5.1%.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Advance HE (2022). [Equality + higher education. Students statistical report 2022](#)

⁵⁷ Prospects (2024). [Graduates with disabilities face persistent employment gap](#)

⁵⁸ Scottish Government (2024). [Longitudinal education outcomes from universities: 2021/22 Scotland](#)

Apprentice Voice: Disabled Modern Apprentices

The [SDS Apprentice Voice](#) research reveals:

Both disabled and non-disabled Modern Apprentices (MA) highlight communication, teamwork, organisational skills, and problem-solving as top skills gained. Disabled MAs report higher rates of job-specific skill acquisition (76% vs. 72%).

- Fewer disabled individuals completing their MA feel confident in their abilities compared to non-disabled completers (77% vs. 81%)
- Disabled MA completers are more likely to continue in full-time employment post-apprenticeship than non-disabled completers (73% vs. 85%)
- Disabled MA completers have a higher self-employment rate post-apprenticeship (5% vs. 3%), reflecting general labour market trends.

The employment rate for disabled people in Scotland is 53% compared to 83% for non-disabled. The disability employment gap (the difference between how many disabled people are in work compared to non-disabled people) of 30 percentage points is the narrowest gap since the Scottish government began publishing this data in 2014. Minority ethnic individuals experience the largest disability employment gaps in Scotland, with only 47% of disabled minority ethnic workers in employment. Disabled men in Scotland also have much lower employment rates than disabled women.⁶⁰ Evidence suggests this may be due to men being less likely to report a disability until it actively affects their ability to work and they become economically inactive.

⁵⁹ SDS (2024). [Modern Apprenticeship statistics 2023/24](#)

⁶⁰ Scottish Government (2024). [Scotland's labour market insights: April 2024](#)

Since 2013, the numbers of **disabled people in work** have steadily increased in Scotland, leading to a reduction in the disability employment gap. Reasons for this are largely due to increasing disability levels in the population, with working people becoming disabled, rather than disabled adults moving into work. An increase in reporting mental health-related disabilities and learning difficulties makes up the biggest component of increasing disability prevalence in Scotland.⁶¹

Evidence focused on disabled workers in the gig economy suggests an increase in the proportion of disabled workers on zero-hours contracts in the UK, particularly for younger or minority ethnic disabled people.⁶²

Intersectionality: Cost-of-living crisis impacts disabled people disproportionately

Disabled people and individuals with long-term health conditions are more likely to experience financial hardship. Nearly half of all those in the UK living in poverty are disabled or living with a disabled person. **Two thirds of disabled working age people under 60 in the UK experience negative impacts from the continuing cost-of-living crisis, reporting cutting essentials such as heating or food.** The impacts on disabled people of cutting back on essentials has a knock-on effect on them managing their disabilities or conditions, staying well and avoiding future hospitalisations for many.⁶³

⁶¹ SPICe (2024). [The declining disability employment gap in Scotland: Understanding the reasons behind the increasing number of disabled people in employment](#)

⁶² Learning and Work Institute (2023). [The future of work: Protected characteristics in a changing workplace](#)

⁶³ Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland (2023). [No life half lived](#)

The **disability pay gap** in the UK was 12.7% in 2023, with disabled employees earning £13.69 per hour compared to £15.69 for non-disabled employees (median earnings). Men experienced a wider disability pay gap than women and pay gaps differed according to types of disabilities reported, with the largest being for autistic people, individuals with epilepsy and severe or specific learning difficulties.⁶⁴

Almost half of disabled workers in Scotland are in the **sectors** of education, retail and health and social work – the sectors representing the largest employers across Scotland. Disabled people are significantly less likely to work in manufacturing, professional, scientific, and technical activities or construction. In the engineering and technology sector disabled people account for 11% of the UK workforce.⁶⁵ **Disabled people are more likely to be self-employed** than non-disabled workers in the UK (13% versus 12%).⁶⁶

Mental health in the workplace has received greater research interest, with employers increasingly expected to support the mental health and wellbeing of employees. There is a strong financial case for employers to invest in the mental health of their workforce, particularly for working parents.⁶⁷ For every £1 employers spend supporting workers' mental health, there is a return of £4.70 on that investment, through increased productivity.

⁶⁴ ONS (2024). [Disability pay gaps in the UK: 2014 to 2023](#)

⁶⁵ Engineering UK (2023). [Industry and workforce](#)

⁶⁶ DWP (2023). [Employment of disabled people 2023](#)

⁶⁷ Deloitte (2024). [Mental health and employers. The case for employers to invest in supporting working parents and a mentally healthy workplace](#)

The experiences of **neurodiverse employees** in the workplace have featured more in the literature on disability. However, it should be noted that not everyone who is neurodivergent will self-identify as disabled and may therefore be under-reported.⁶⁸ A study of 1,436 neurodivergent workers in the UK reported barriers to sharing their conditions with employers, with 65% fearing discrimination from management and 55% from colleagues.⁶⁹

Outcomes are poor for **autistic adults**. The Buckland Review of autism employment⁷⁰ highlights that:

- just 3 in 10 autistic adults are in work compared to 5 in 10 of all disabled people and 8 in 10 for non-disabled people
- autistic people face the largest pay gap of all disability groups
- autistic graduates are twice as likely to be unemployed after 15 months than non-disabled graduates. Autistic graduates are also most likely to be overqualified for the job they have.

SDS PhD Programme: Neurodivergent youth career paths

SDS sponsored PhD student **Martina Lippi** is undertaking PhD research to understand **neurodivergent youth career trajectories**. This considers what drives their decisions to pursue a specific career trajectory and how they make sense of them. The impact on mental health is also examined. Martina uses a mixed method approach, collecting semi-structured interviews through photo-elicitation to understand young neurodivergent lived experiences of career transitions, and analysing secondary quantitative data to provide insights of how their career trajectories have evolved over time and the impact on mental health. The study's final aim is to help support young neurodivergent career aspirations, providing insights on, and help to reduce their high unemployment level.

For more information, please see the [PhD programme brochure](#)

⁶⁸ DWP (2024). [The Buckland Review of autism employment: report and recommendations](#)

⁶⁹ McDowall and Doyle (2024). [2024 Neurodiversity in business and work academic research](#)

⁷⁰ DWP (2024) [The Buckland Review of autism employment: report and recommendations](#)

The employment rate for people with a learning disability is particularly low, estimated at 4.1% for those adults with a learning disability known to local authorities in Scotland. Many of those with learning disabilities do not engage or are not known to disability services.⁷¹ Research into employers' fears and concerns around recruiting workers with learning disabilities⁷² found several themes including:

- lack of knowledge about learning disabilities leading to prejudice
- lack of organisational priority
- lack of understanding about accessible recruitment practices
- uncertainty over where to start and perceived costs.

Attitudes towards disabled workers continue to place limitations on their position in the workplace. A study by Scope on attitudes towards disabled people found that 42% of disabled people who had been in work, education or training in the last five years had experienced negative attitudes from management or other work colleagues. As a result of negative experiences, over a third of respondents said they were now avoiding looking for employment completely.⁷³

SDS PhD Programme: Unpaid carers and individuals with disabilities

SDS sponsored PhD student [Louise MacAulay](#) is undertaking PhD research to explore labour market inequalities for unpaid carers and individuals with disabilities. Her research compares large scale surveys along with employment quality and wellbeing.

For more information please see the [PhD programme brochure](#)

⁷¹ Fraser of Allender Institute (2024). [Exploring the labour market data landscape for individuals with learning disabilities in Scotland](#)

⁷² Fraser of Allender Institute (2024). [Research on employer behaviour regarding hiring people with learning disabilities](#)

⁷³ Scope (2022). [Attitudes and disability](#)

5. Gender (Sex)

Key points

- Girls continue to outperform boys in education but remain disadvantaged in a labour market characterised by occupational segregation, low pay and underrepresentation at higher levels.
- Subject choice impacts on educational and labour market outcomes with women and girls underrepresented in STEM subjects and occupations.
- Sexism and sexual harassment experienced at school and in the workplace impacts on the outcomes and wellbeing of women and girls.

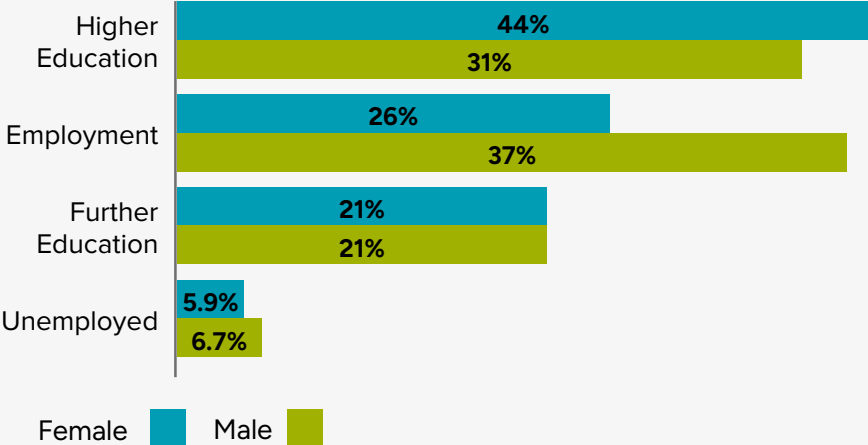
Data availability

A wide range of data and evidence is available on gender from administrative data, social surveys and secondary research. However, there is often a lack of information on how gender interacts with other equality characteristics such as ethnicity or disability. Data availability may also be an issue where gender has not been considered in the analysis.

School

At school, girls continue to out-perform boys in terms of **attainment and positive** post school destinations. In 2024, young women (16 to 19 years) were more likely to be taking part in education, training, or employment than young men (93.2% compared to 92.3%) and much more likely to be in education (76.5%) compared to young men (66.3%).⁷⁴ Figure 4 compares post school destinations highlighting that girls are more likely to go on to higher education.⁷⁵

Figure 4. Post school destinations by gender, 2022/23 (%)



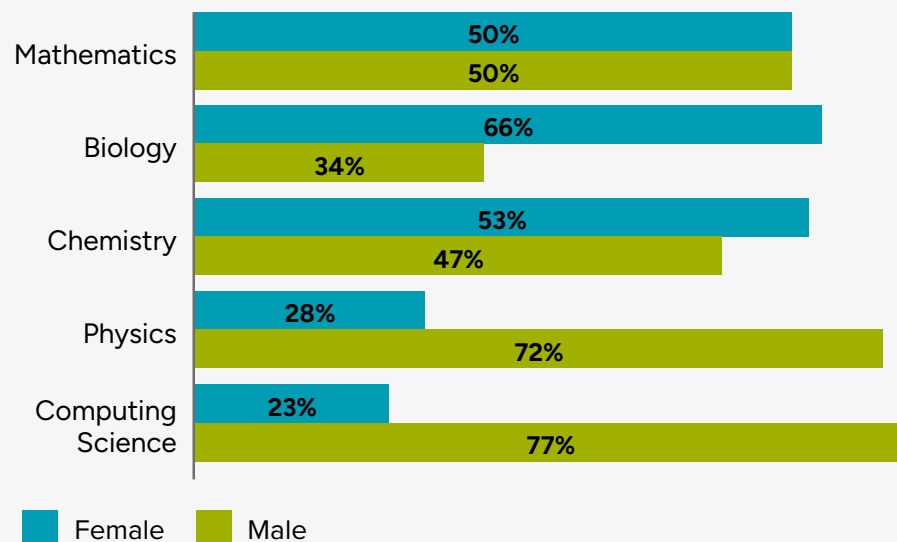
Source: Scottish Government (2024) Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations.

⁷⁴ SDS (2024). Annual participation measure for 16-19 year olds in Scotland 2024

⁷⁵ Scottish Government (2024). Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations

Differences continue in the **subject choices** made by girls and boys. Subject choice impacts on future educational and career opportunities available to both boys and girls and is associated with gender segregation in the labour market.⁷⁶ For example, the gender imbalance in the STEM sector, can partly be linked to the subject choices made at school which continue into further and higher education.⁷⁷ Figure 5 compares entries for the five most popular STEM subjects at National 5 level and shows that although there is parity for maths and chemistry, girls are more likely to choose biology, and boys are more likely to choose physics or computing.

Figure 5. National 5 entries to STEM subjects by gender, 2024 (%)



Source: SQA attainment statistics 2024

⁷⁶ Close the Gap (2020). [A gender review of developing the young workforce](#)
⁷⁷ Ekosgen (2024). [Factors in Successful STEM Learner Engagement A case study approach Final Report for Education Scotland](#)
⁷⁸ Scottish Government (2024). [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#)
⁷⁹ SQA (2024). [Attainment statistics 2024](#)

Girls have **higher levels of attainment**, at SCQF Level 4, 5 and 6 than boys and this gap increases at the higher SCQF levels.⁷⁸ Girls tend to score higher than boys across all subjects and levels. In STEM subjects, such as, physics and computing, where girls are underrepresented, their attainment is above that of boys.⁷⁹

Sexism and gender stereotypes can impact on girls' experiences of school. Over half of girls aged 11 to 16 years (58%) who responded to the UK Girls' Attitudes Survey reported either seeing or experiencing sexism at school or in their daily life, leading them to feel reduced levels of safety and confidence, potentially impacting on girls learning and thriving at school.⁸⁰ A snapshot of girls' attitudes across Scotland reported that almost one in five girls and young women (aged 11-21) felt that gender stereotypes held them back at school. **High levels of sexual violence and sexual harassment are reported in UK schools**, with teachers and staff in schools stating that they do not feel well equipped to deal with these issues. Nearly one third of girls responded that school does not make them feel safe from sexual harassment. Black and minority ethnic young women report experiencing **racialised sexual harassment** in school where comments are made about their ethnicity and religious clothing.⁸¹ Feelings of safety at school declined when exploring combined equality characteristics with gender. For example, 19% of all girls and young women reported feeling completely safe in educational settings which decreased to 11% for LGBT girls and young women, to 10% for disabled girls and young women and 8% for girls and young women with a mental health condition.⁸²

⁸⁰ Girlguiding (2024). [Girls' Attitudes Survey 2024](#)
⁸¹ End Violence Against Women (2023). [A Whole School Approach to ending violence against women and girls](#)
⁸² Plan International (2024). [The state of girls' rights in the UK 2024](#)

Girls are more likely to enrol on **Foundation Apprenticeships** than boys. For example, 61% of new starters in 2021 were female, compared with 39% male. Gender splits across the individual FA frameworks reflect the gender balance in subject choice at school. For example, girls are more likely to choose social services and healthcare or hospitality FA frameworks, while boys are more likely to opt for construction, engineering, IT and financial services.⁸³

Young People's Careers Ambitions: Gender

SDS asked school leavers across Scotland about their career ambitions, influences and motivations and found that:

- both young men and women stated that parents or carers were their primary influence on their career aspirations.
- young women were more likely to say that the qualifications they achieved in school had an influence on their future career choices than young men.
- over half of young women respondents (54%) said that not having enough confidence in themselves was a barrier to career development, compared to 40% of young men.
- young women were three times more likely to say that they wanted to enter a career in the health, social care or social work sectors than young men. With young men ten times more likely to say they wanted to go into construction and engineering than young women.⁸⁴

Further and higher education

Young women continue into further and higher education in greater numbers than young men. At college women account for 56% of full-time higher education students and 49% of full-time further education students. At university women account for 60% of all Scottish domiciled undergraduate entrants.⁸⁵

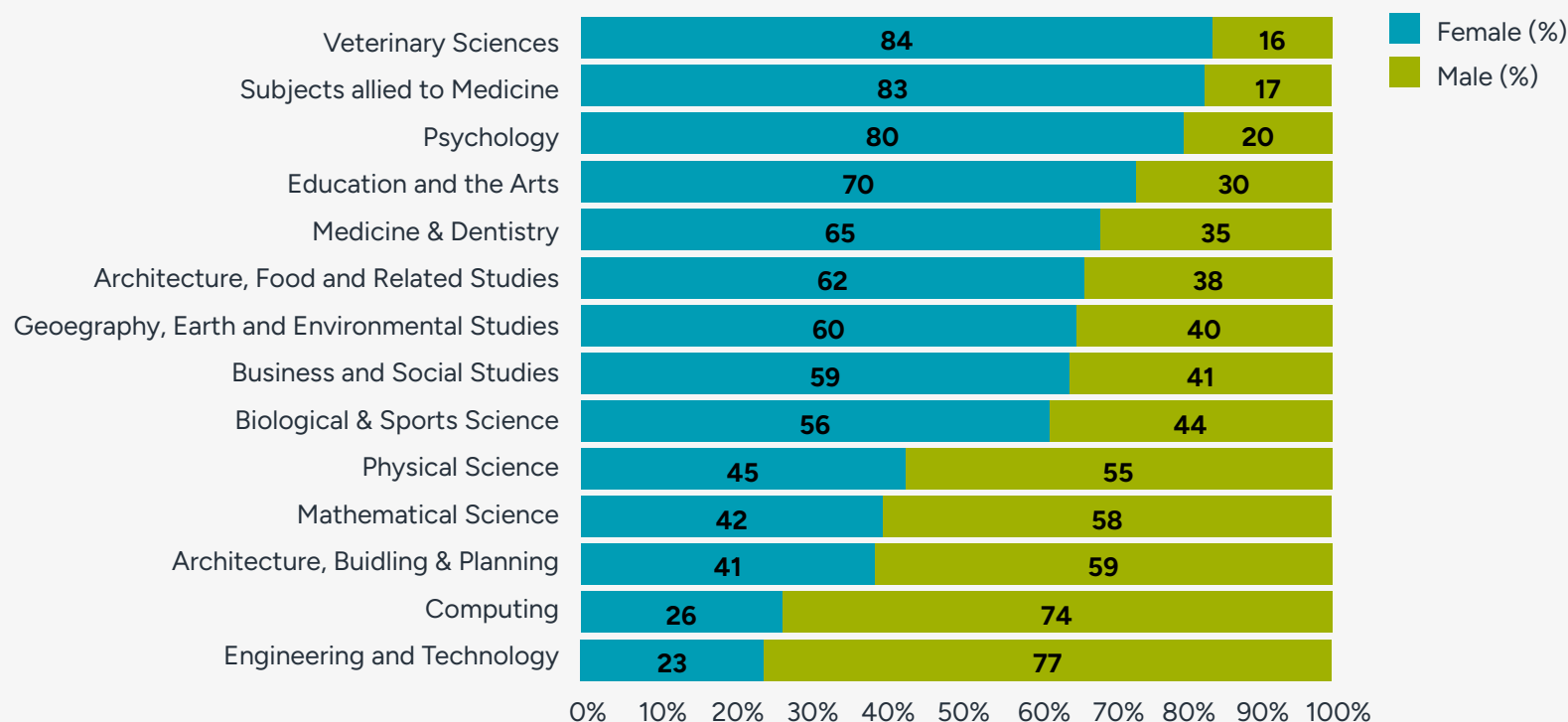
At both college and university there is continued gender imbalance by subject choice, which while reflecting the existing labour market, impacts on future labour market options and can lead to occupational segregation, as shown in Figure 6 on the next page.

⁸³ SDS (2023). [Foundation apprenticeship report](#)

⁸⁴ SDS (2023). [Young people's career ambitions 2022/23 – Equality infographics](#)

⁸⁵ SFC (2024). [HE students and qualifiers at Scottish institutions 2022-24](#)

Figure 6. Subject area and gender for all HEI students in Scotland, 2022/23 (%)



Source: SFC (2024) HE students and qualifiers at Scottish Institutions 2022/23

SDS PhD Programme: Gendered careers information landscapes

[Maria Cecil](#) is an SDS sponsored PhD student exploring gendered information landscapes and how these impact on apprenticeships. Maria's research focuses on understanding how different sources of gender stereotyping impact on young people's career choices.

For more information, please see the [PhD programme brochure](#)

Labour market

Women's experiences and participation in the labour market continues to differ from men's in terms of pay, progression, and conflicts between work and caring responsibilities. Women are affected by low pay and the continuing gender pay gap, meaning they will earn significantly less than men over their entire careers. Scotland however has a narrower gender pay gap for full time and all workers than the UK overall in 2024.⁸⁶

More men than women undertake **Modern Apprenticeships** with Q2 2024/25 figures showing **35%** female starters and **64%** male. There has been a 7% increase in the number of women starting an MA compared to 2023/24.⁸⁷ The **Scottish Apprenticeships Advisory Board Gender Commission** acknowledges however that women remain underrepresented in apprenticeship frameworks most likely to give the greatest returns in terms of pay, employment opportunities and skills development.⁸⁸ For **graduate apprenticeships** women accounted for 32% of enrolments in 2021/22 and men 68%. Women account for the largest proportion of students in accounting frameworks (61%). In all other frameworks men are the dominant gender, although the number of women has increased for those studying civil engineering.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Scottish Government (2024). [Annual survey of hours and earnings: 2024](#)

⁸⁷ SDS (2024). [Modern Apprenticeship statistics Q2, 2024/25](#)

⁸⁸ SAAB (2022). [Gender Commission report and recommendations](#)

⁸⁹ SFC and SDS (2022) [Graduate Apprenticeship Annual Report 2022](#)

⁹⁰ SDS (2023). [Apprentice Voice](#)

⁹¹ ONS (2024). [Employment rate Scotland aged 16 -64](#)

⁹² Scotland's Census (2022). [Country by sex and age by hours worked by economic activity](#)

⁹³ Scottish Government (2024). [Labour market trends: November 2024](#)

⁹⁴ Scottish Government (2022). [Scotland's labour market: People, places and regions-protected characteristics](#)

⁹⁵ Centre for Progressive Policy (2022). [What women want: Tackling gender inequalities in unpaid care and the workplace](#)

Apprentice Voice: Gender representation in Modern Apprenticeships

The [SDS Apprentice Voice research](#) found that male and female Modern Apprentices report similar progress in areas of personal development such as confidence in abilities or knowing how to achieve goals during their qualification. A greater proportion of male apprentices reported perceiving that they had better long-term career prospects following their MA than female apprentices.⁹⁰

Women continue to be less likely to be in **employment** than men, with an employment rate in 2024 of 71%.⁹⁰ Women make up the majority of **part-time workers** with 42% of all women in employment the week prior to the 2022 Census working part-time (30 hours or less), compared to 16% of men.⁹²

Economic inactivity rates are higher for women than men. Just over one quarter (26%) of women in Scotland (aged 16-64) are classed as economically inactive, compared to 21% of men.⁹³ Reasons for inactivity differ between men and women, with more women stating they were looking after family/home than men, although the largest reason stated for both men and women is long-term sickness.⁹⁴ The unequal division of unpaid care for both children and adults continues to result in gender inequalities in the UK workplace.⁹⁵

Insecure work is a continuing concern for both men and women, with evidence suggesting that the job 'insecurity score' for UK women is 25% higher than for men.⁹⁶ Women are also more likely than men to be on zero-hours contracts across the UK, adding to issues of precarity in employment.⁹⁷ Women are also more likely to be in jobs at a higher risk of automation across the UK.⁹⁸

The participation of older women in the workforce continues. Scotland's Census data shows that in the week before the Census in 2022, 125,994 women aged 60 to 69 reported being employed, with 40% working 16 to 30 hours and 40% working between 31 and 48 hours.⁹⁹ Research suggests that women who feel they have no choice but to continue to work later on in their life (from 60 to 69 years) due to low pension benefits, are more at risk of experiencing this period of extended employment as a forced and stressful path.¹⁰⁰

The percentage of female CEOs across the UK reduced from 28% in 2022/23 to 19% in 2024. Reasons given by women who had left CEO roles recently included public pressure, caring responsibilities and feeling that they needed to behave more like men than they were comfortable with in these roles.¹⁰¹

Scotland's Gender Equality Index attempts to represent gender equality numerically, with a score of one suggesting no gender equality and 100 suggesting full gender equality. Scotland's overall gender equality score for 2023 is 79 (increasing from 72 in 2020). Measures indicated more gender equality in politics and

positions of power for women at a national rather than local level. For example, in 2022/23 45.7% of Scotland's MSPs were women, increasing from 35.7% in the previous year.¹⁰²

Women hold only 36% of the key decision-making positions in Scotland. Research highlights that the underrepresentation of women in key high-level roles, means that women's views and perspectives are therefore not being considered at higher levels.¹⁰³

The number of new **female-led companies in Scotland increased by 11% in 2023**, compared to the whole UK increase of 7%. The percentage of female-led companies in Scotland remains lower than those of male-led companies at just under 20%, in line with similar figures in Wales, England and Northern Ireland.

The **occupational segregation** of men and women in certain kinds of jobs and in different levels of employment remains a key labour market issue. Women tend to be disproportionately affected by occupational segregation, impacting on their potential pay and career progression. Both women and men continue to be segregated into certain occupations and industries. Figure 7 (on next page) outlines employment by industry from the 2022 Scottish Census, highlighting the segregation of women and men into certain industries. Most notably men are concentrated in construction and women in health and social work industries. In terms of occupation, Scottish census figures highlight that women continue to be underrepresented in managerial and senior roles in the workplace, occupying 40% of these roles.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁶ Class (2022). [The insecure economy](#)

⁹⁷ Scottish Government (2022). [Fair work action plan: becoming a leading fair work nation by 2025](#)

⁹⁸ Windett et al. (2023). [The future of work: Protected characteristics in a changing workplace](#)

⁹⁹ Scotland's Census (2022). [Country by Sex and Age by Hours Worked by Economic activity](#)

¹⁰⁰ Turek et al (2024). [Gender and educational inequalities in extending working lives](#)

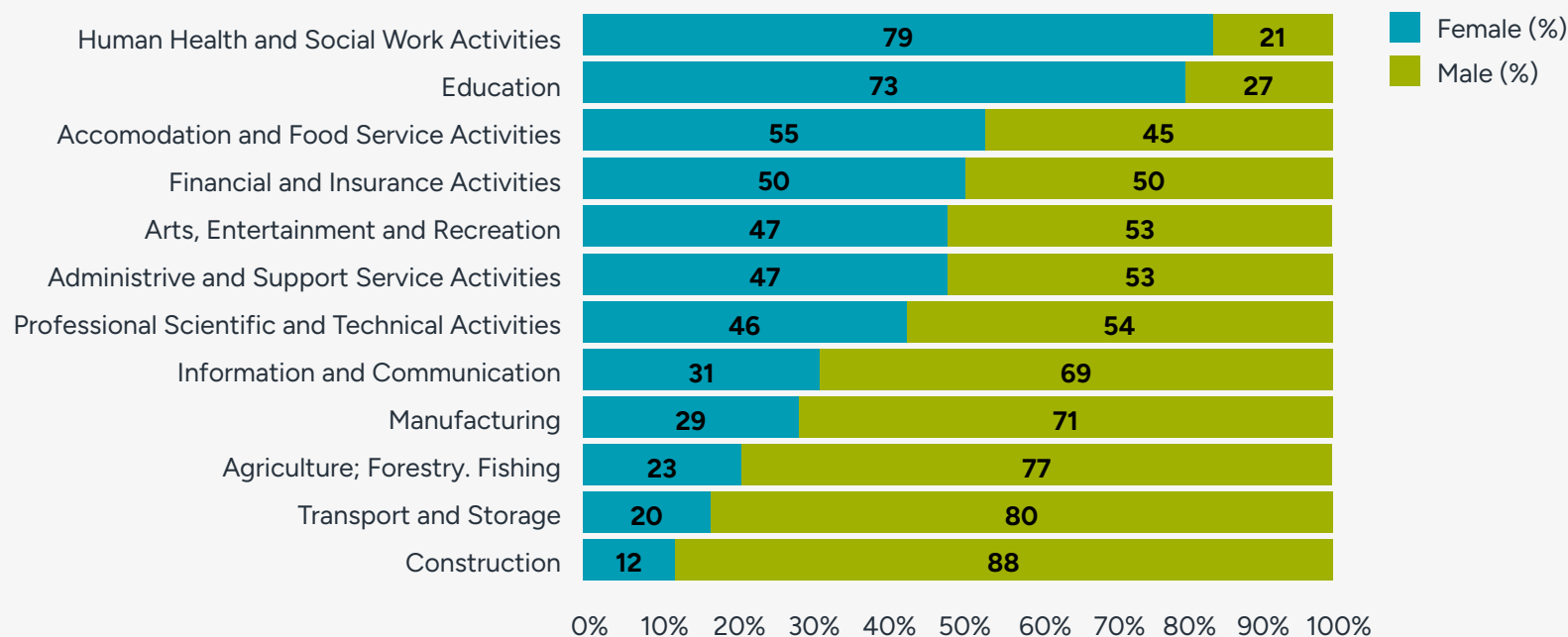
¹⁰¹ Grant Thornton (2024). [Women in Business 2024. Pathways to parity](#)

¹⁰² Scottish Government (2023). [Gender Equality Index](#)

¹⁰³ Engender (2023). [Sex and power in Scotland 2023](#)

¹⁰⁴ Scotland's Census (2024). [Education, labour market and travel to work](#)

Figure 7. Employment by industry and gender, 2022 (%)



Source: Scotland's census 2022

Women are under-represented in **STEM** sectors despite continued interventions and efforts to improve women's participation and experiences. In engineering, women comprise only 16% of the workforce in the UK.¹⁰⁵ Findings from a Fawcett report found that sexism at work was a large issue in the UK technology sector, with 72% of women in tech roles saying they have experienced sexism at work. Black and minority ethnic women in tech roles reported

compounded exclusion at work, with one in three Black women reporting assumptions by colleagues that they did not hold a technical role. A large proportion of women reported considering leaving their role at least once a week (43%), suggesting an ongoing crisis in both recruitment and retention of women.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ Atkins (2022). Career deflection. [Exploring diversity, progression and retention in engineering](#)

¹⁰⁶ Fawcett (2023). [System update: Addressing the gender gap in tech](#)

Additional research found that stereotyping, isolation and bias in the workplace resulted in women leaving the **engineering** fields at twice the rate of men. At the current slow rate of progress in increasing diversity in UK engineering, it will take more than a century for there to be equal numbers of women as men in engineering jobs.¹⁰⁷ A report on women in the Scottish STEM landscape found a culture of exclusion in STEM workplaces, with informal work events and out of hours meetings making women feel excluded and demotivated. Respondents also reported that gynaecological or reproductive health issues had negatively affected their work and that workplaces were not accommodating these issues well enough.¹⁰⁸

Emerging evidence suggests there is a gender gap in use and adoption of **Artificial Intelligence** (AI) in the workplace. Research carried out with over 25,000 working adults worldwide found 56% of men using generative AI at least once a week at work, compared to 51% of women. For younger workers the gender gap appears to increase, with 71% of men aged 18-24 using AI weekly compared to 59% of young women.¹⁰⁹ A study of over 100,000 workers in Denmark where AI is an option for usage within their daily work found that women are 20 percentage points less likely to use ChatGPT compared with men working in the same occupation. Nearly half of women said that the main reason preventing them using ChatGPT is a lack of training.¹¹⁰

Sexual harassment at work is an issue for many women. One third of women responding to a survey by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC) said they had experienced sexual harassment at work within the last year. Findings highlighted issues around reporting sexual harassment incidents in the workplace, with only 15% of women who had reported sexual harassment feeling that their experiences were taken seriously and had received an appropriate response.¹¹¹

There is greater recognition of the challenges faced by women experiencing the **menopause in the workplace**, and the need for employer support when recruiting, retaining and managing the needs of female employees. Around one-third of women reported facing moderate or severe difficulties coping at work due to menopausal symptoms in a survey of over 400 women in England. Women experiencing financial difficulties and those in insecure jobs or employment where they feel unappreciated or are dissatisfied appeared to be at greatest risk.¹¹² Workplace support from employers, managers and colleagues is reported to make a significant difference on the impact of menopausal symptoms at work for women experiencing them. Creating effective menopause policies in the workplace to retain women is suggested as a key measure along with de-stigmatisation in the workplace to enable menopause to be talked about more openly, similar to the developments in talking about mental health at work in recent years.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Atkins (2022). [Career deflection. Exploring diversity, progression and retention in engineering](#)

¹⁰⁸ Equate Scotland (2023). [Women in the Scottish STEM landscape](#)

¹⁰⁹ World Economic Forum (2024). [Women are falling behind on generative AI in the workplace](#)

¹¹⁰ Humlum and Vestergaard (2024). [The adoption of ChatGPT](#)

¹¹¹ STUC (2022). [Silence is compliance](#)

¹¹² D'Angelo et al. (2022). [Impact of menopausal symptoms on work](#)

¹¹³ Rowsell, J. (2023). [Will new data encourage better menopause support at work?](#) People Management

6. Poverty

Key points

- Child poverty affects one in four children in Scotland and childhood poverty can have long-term impacts.
- Pupils from the most deprived areas continue to be less likely to enter higher education than those from the least deprived areas.
- Most individuals that are in poverty are within working households and are experiencing in-work poverty.

Data availability

Data on poverty is widely available. However, there are variations in definitions of poverty. The following definitions are commonly used.

- Geography based – Poverty can be measured by geography. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranks Scottish postcodes to indicate how deprived the area is. This ranking is based on a range of factors, including average education levels of residents, crime levels, and housing quality. SIMD 1 = most deprived and SIMD 5 = least deprived.
- Income – Income is widely used as an indicator for individual or household poverty. Households in the UK are classed as living in poverty if they are 60% below the median household income.¹¹⁴
- Occupation – The job that an individual has can be categorised hierarchically. The 'NS-SEC' measurement fits occupations into a scale of occupational prestige, which also broadly captures levels of pay too.¹¹⁵

Poverty across the Scottish population¹¹⁶

- In Scotland, there are over a million people living in poverty, including about one quarter of a million children.
- One in four children are currently living in poverty.
- Over half of children in minority ethnic families (53%) are in poverty.

¹¹⁴ Scottish Government (2022). [Poverty in Scotland: methodology](#)

¹¹⁵ ONS (2021). [The National Statistics Socio-economic classification \(NS-SEC\)](#)

¹¹⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024). [Poverty in Scotland 2024](#)

School

Poverty has a significant impact on all aspects of children’s lives depriving children of resources and opportunities central to their early development and widening inequalities between those children and their peers. Inequality in childhood can create multifaceted and long-lasting damage on children that can persist into adolescence and adulthood.¹¹⁷

The **Annual Participation Measure**¹¹⁸ shows that in 2024:

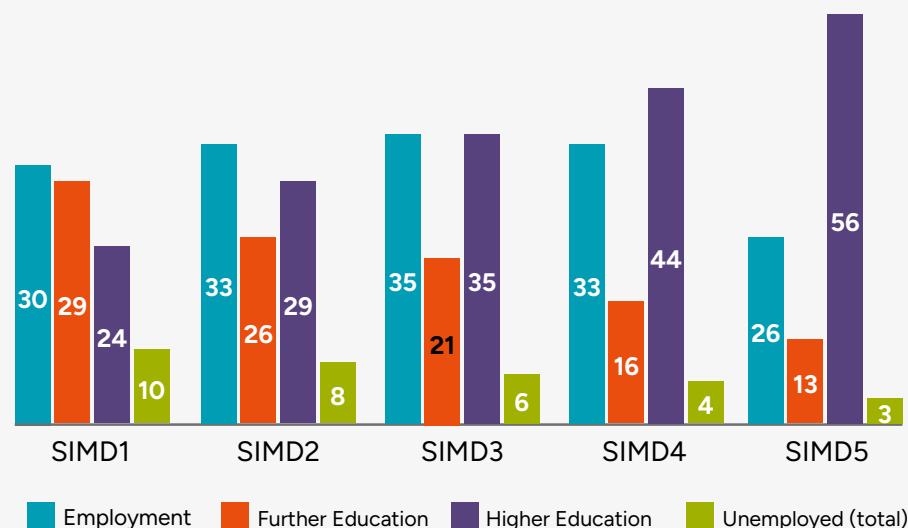
- those living in the most deprived areas are less likely to be participating in learning, training, and work (88.4%), compared to those living in the least deprived areas (96.6%)
- those in the most deprived areas are less likely to be in education – 65% compared to 81.6% of those in the least deprived
- the participation gap between those who lived in the 20% most deprived areas and those in the 20% least deprived areas was 9.1 pp, compared to 9.3 pp in 2022 and 12.9 pp in 2016. This is narrowest gap on record.

Pupils from the most deprived areas have consistently **lower levels of attainment**. This attainment gap widens as pupils move through the school system. For example, at SCQF Level 6 or higher, the attainment gap was 36.9 percentage points in 2022/23.¹¹⁹

The percentage of school leavers in a positive initial destination has increased for leavers from the (20%) most deprived areas and slightly decreased for those from the (20%) least deprived areas, compared to 2021/22. Together this has led to a narrowing of the

deprivation gap, from 4.4 percentage points in 2021/22 to 3.7 percentage points in 2022/23. The narrowing of the deprivation gap between 2021/22 and 2022/23 is mainly due to the ratios of school leavers in higher education. However, it should be noted that those from the most deprived areas are still less likely to go to higher education from school, as outlined in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Initial school leaver destinations by SIMD (2022/23) (%)



Source: [Summary Statistics for Attainment and Initial Leaver Destinations, 2022/23](#)

¹¹⁷ Poverty Alliance (2024). 'You just see the prices go up...': Families' experiences of in-work poverty in Scotland and implications for children's human rights Policy briefing Serving the Future

¹¹⁸ SDS (2024). Annual participation measure 2024

¹¹⁹ Scottish Government (2024). Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations edition

Research on poverty in childhood highlights that:

- there has been a 26% increase in relative child poverty in Scotland¹²⁰
- pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience mental health struggles; bullying and exclusion; have poorer attendance; and are less likely to feel part of their school's community¹²¹
- families with intersecting protected characteristics such as households with disabled children and minority ethnic households are at risk of living in poverty¹²²
- child poverty is family poverty. When parents are exposed to in-work poverty, their access to services and resources that are vital for them like money, food, housing, gas and education are all affected¹²³
- poverty and deprivation can affect pupils' regular attendance and concentration at school, and opportunities to join in social and cultural activities.¹²⁴ Extra costs for trips, events, and uniform can act as a barrier to school participation.¹²⁵

Intersectionality: Disability and poverty

Data shows that almost a third of children with a disabled person in the household, were in relative poverty after housing costs.¹²⁶ For families without a disabled member, the comparative figure was a fifth. A fifth of children in families with a disabled member were in severe poverty after housing costs compared to only 14% of children in families without a disabled member.¹²⁷

¹²⁰ Poverty and Inequality Report (2024). [Poverty and Inequality Commission Annual Report 2023-2024](#)

¹²¹ Mowat, J.G. (2020). [Interrogating the relationship between poverty, attainment and mental health and wellbeing: the importance of social networks and support](#)

¹²² Poverty Alliance (2024). [‘You just see the prices go up...’: Families’ experiences of in-work poverty in Scotland and implications for children’s human rights](#)

¹²³ Poverty and Inequality Report (2024). [Poverty and Inequality Commission Annual Report 2023-2024](#)

Further and higher education

At **college** those from the 20% most deprived areas comprise **32%** of all students studying full-time at FE level, at HE level in college the figure is **28%**. In 2022/23 16% of Scottish domiciled entrants to full-time first-degree courses at **university** were from the 20% most deprived areas. There is significant variance in levels of representation by mode of study, institution and sector. At **university**, those from the most deprived areas are most likely to study subjects allied to medicine, combined and general studies, and computing; and least likely to study veterinary science, geography or mathematics.¹²⁸

Graduates from deprived areas continue to face inequalities in job outcomes. Longitudinal Education Outcomes data for 2021/22¹²⁹ shows that five years after graduation, graduates from the most deprived areas earn a median of £28,500, compared to £32,500 for those from the least deprived areas. Variations in earnings could be due to differences in the subjects they study or universities they attend.

¹²⁴ SERA (2024). [Poverty and Education](#)

¹²⁵ Public Health Scotland (2024). [Child poverty in schools](#)

¹²⁶ Poverty Alliance (2024). [‘You just see the prices go up...’: Families’ experiences of in-work poverty in Scotland and implications for children’s human rights](#)

¹²⁷ Scottish Government (2021). [National Performance Framework - disability perspective: analysis](#)

¹²⁸ SFC (2024). [Report on widening access 2022/23](#)

¹²⁹ Scottish Government (2024). [Longitudinal education outcomes from universities: 2021/22 Scotland](#)

Labour market

Poverty remains a challenge across the labour market. Research suggests that it is now more common in Scotland to be **working in poverty** than it is to be in poverty and out of work.¹³⁰ Over 10% of workers in Scotland are trapped in permanent low pay as they are paid below the real Living Wage and 72% of workers trapped in low pay are women.¹³¹ Five high-priority industries are responsible for maintaining in-work poverty – retail, hospitality, manufacturing, health and social work, and the administration and support services.¹³²

The latest **Modern Apprenticeship** statistics by SDS¹³³ show an increase in the achievement rate for MA by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile, from the 10% most deprived areas to the 10% least deprived areas. The achievement rate for those living in the most deprived areas in 2023/24 was 72%, 2.7 pp higher than last year and 3.7 pp lower than the overall achievement rate. The achievement rate gap between those living in the least deprived and most deprived areas was 8.5% in 2023/24. This is the first year since then that we have seen the gap widen (+2.7 pp on last year).¹³⁴

¹³⁰ Poverty Alliance (2024). [‘You just see the prices go up...’: Families’ experiences of in-work poverty in Scotland and implications for children’s human rights](#)

¹³¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023). [Poverty in Scotland 2023](#)

¹³² Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023). [Poverty in Scotland 2023](#)

¹³³ Skills Development Scotland (2025). [Modern Apprenticeship Statistics](#)

¹³⁴ Skills Development Scotland (2025). [Modern Apprenticeship Statistics](#)

7. Pregnancy and maternity

Key points

- Teenage mothers are less likely to finish their school education, and this may have long-term impact on their education and career opportunities.
- Student mothers at universities experience conflicting roles of being both a mother and student, leading to stress, guilt, and anxiety, along with financial difficulties.
- Student mothers in HE face major challenges in finding time and space for their studies.
- Women often experience a pay penalty for motherhood.

Data availability

Data is not routinely collected in relation to pregnancy and maternity leading to gaps in evidence.

¹³⁵ Public Health Scotland (2024). [Teenage Pregnancy](#)

¹³⁶ Nuffield Trust (2023). [Teenage Pregnancy](#)

¹³⁷ Todd, A. (2024). [Student-parents' experiences of personal and academic support in UK higher education: barriers and challenges to equality of opportunity and policy and practice recommendations to mitigate them](#)

School

Pregnancy data from Public Health Scotland highlights that teenage pregnancy rate increases can be observed across all levels of deprivation in 2022; however, the increases were greater in less deprived areas than in the most deprived. Despite this, the relationship between early pregnancy and economic deprivation remains significant. Teenage pregnancy rates were more than three times higher for those living in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas in 2022.

Teenage pregnancy can have a negative effect on the education of mothers attending school. It can lead to interruption of schooling and hinder return to school. Many teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education.

Following a decade of decline, figures from Public Health Scotland indicate that teenage pregnancy rates rose for the first time in over a decade, increasing from 23.2 per 1,000 women in 2021 to 27.1 in 2022.¹³⁵ This increase was mostly driven by pregnancies between 17 and 19 years old.

Further education/higher education

Studies suggest that teenage pregnancy is linked to poorer results for both young parents and their children. Young mothers are less likely to complete their education and more likely experience poverty. They face a higher risk of mental health problems compared to older mothers.¹³⁶ As a result, young mothers can face many challenges while pursuing further and higher education. Also, time pressure in meeting assessment deadlines can trigger stress and anxiety for student mothers which may impact on attainment, progression and retention.¹³⁷

Labour market

Childcare responsibility is one of the well-known contributors to low female participation in employment and it has interrupted the careers of women across different occupations. Research shows that childcare costs and childcare availability have a more negative impact on mothers.¹³⁸ For Black and minoritised women, this negative impact is compounded by the motherhood pay penalty and an existing ethnicity pay gap.

Studies show that women often experience a pay penalty for motherhood. Penalties can start from the moment when a woman tells her employer that she is pregnant.¹³⁹ For medium to long term income, the average motherhood pay penalty is a reduction of medium to long term income of 45% compared to women who have not had children. Also, the gender pay gap between mothers' and fathers' income is significant. An average gender pay gap of 10% in hourly pay when the first baby arrives grows to about 30% by the time the child is twenty.

One of the main barriers to mothers looking for paid work in the UK is childcare - over 78% of respondents said they would need to carefully consider their childcare options before accepting a promotion or a new job.¹⁴⁰ Other barriers to employment for mothers are lack of suitable jobs with flexibility to meet childcare demand; absence of qualifications and experience.¹⁴¹

Working mothers under 25 are more likely to be in in-work poverty and more likely to be lone parents. Two in five mothers under 25 in paid work are in relative poverty, with average hourly pay for low-income households with a mother under 25 at £7.20 compared to £8.20 for all low-income families.¹⁴²

Young women with dependent children are least likely to be in employment. The employment rate of White mothers is 5 percentage points lower than that of White women without children, while women of Indian, Black African, and Chinese heritage see employment gaps of up to 11 percentage points. Black Caribbean mothers see a marginal increase in employment rates compared to women without children.¹⁴³

Mothers are more likely to have flexible working arrangements compared to fathers (15% versus 12%), such as working flexible hours or term-time working.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Webb, A. (2023). [Juggling childcare and work: The challenges facing mothers-performers in Scotland](#)

¹³⁹ Fawcett Equality (2023). [The Ethnicity Motherhood Pay Penalty](#)

¹⁴⁰ Bright Horizon (2024). [Modern Families Index 2024](#)

¹⁴¹ Webb, A. (2023). [Juggling childcare and work: The challenges facing mothers-performers in Scotland](#)

¹⁴² Scottish Government (2022). [Tackling child poverty delivery plan: fourth year progress report 2021-2022 - focus report on households with mothers aged 25 or under](#)

¹⁴³ Fawcett Equality (2023). [The Ethnicity Motherhood Pay Penalty](#)

¹⁴⁴ ONS (2021). [Families and the labour market, UK: 2021](#)

8. Race

Key points

- Despite high levels of attainment and progression in education, minority ethnic individuals in Scotland do not experience the same labour market advantages as their White counterparts. Minority ethnic individuals are disproportionately more likely to work in low-paying sectors and less likely to hold managerial or senior positions in business.
- Outcomes for minority ethnic students differ by ethnic background, with White British students having better outcomes in terms of degree attainment and potential future earnings.
- Discrimination at work is widely reported by minority ethnic workers and is a key issue.

Ethnicity in Scotland

Figures from the 2022 Scottish census show that¹⁴⁵:

- the proportion of people in Scotland with a minority ethnic background was recorded as 7.1% from the 2022 census. The proportion is higher in younger age groups and varies geographically. The increase in people from minority ethnic backgrounds was driven by increases across several groups
- the majority of people in Scotland identify as Scottish (77.7%) or 'Other British' (9.4%)

Definitions and data availability

SDS recognises that using umbrella terms such as Black and Minority Ethnic (BME or BAME) can cause issues. The terms BAME or BME don't always include White minority ethnic groups. SDS further recognises that there are distinct and unique identities and different barriers facing different minority ethnic communities. These differences and challenges can be obscured when research aggregates all minority ethnic groups together under the terms BAME or BME. In this context, and more broadly, we remain committed to understanding and addressing discrimination and acknowledge that people may find the terms do not accurately describe their identity and we support everyone's right to define themselves.

A range of definitions of ethnicity are used in administrative data, surveys and research reports. In this document the terms minority ethnic, BAME, and BME are used – depending on the definition used in the source data or research.

One of the key issues with understanding outcomes in relation to minority ethnic groups in Scotland is the lack of data. Small sample sizes mean that it not always possible to provide a detailed breakdown for different ethnic groups. Broad analyses that compare minority ethnic groups with that of the White Scottish / UK population very often conceal wide variations within groups.

It should be noted that ethnicity in survey data is self-reported and in some cases individuals may not be willing to disclose their ethnicity or feel that the available categories do not reflect their ethnicity.

¹⁴⁵ Scottish Government (2022). [Scotland Census](#)

School

According to the **Pupil Census 2023**¹⁴⁶, 73% of pupils in Scotland were recorded as being White Scottish. The next largest categories were White Other British (6.5%), White Other 3.7%, White Polish 2.4% and Asian Pakistani 2.2%. In addition, a total of 2,155 pupils were recorded as asylum seekers and 6,556 as refugees.

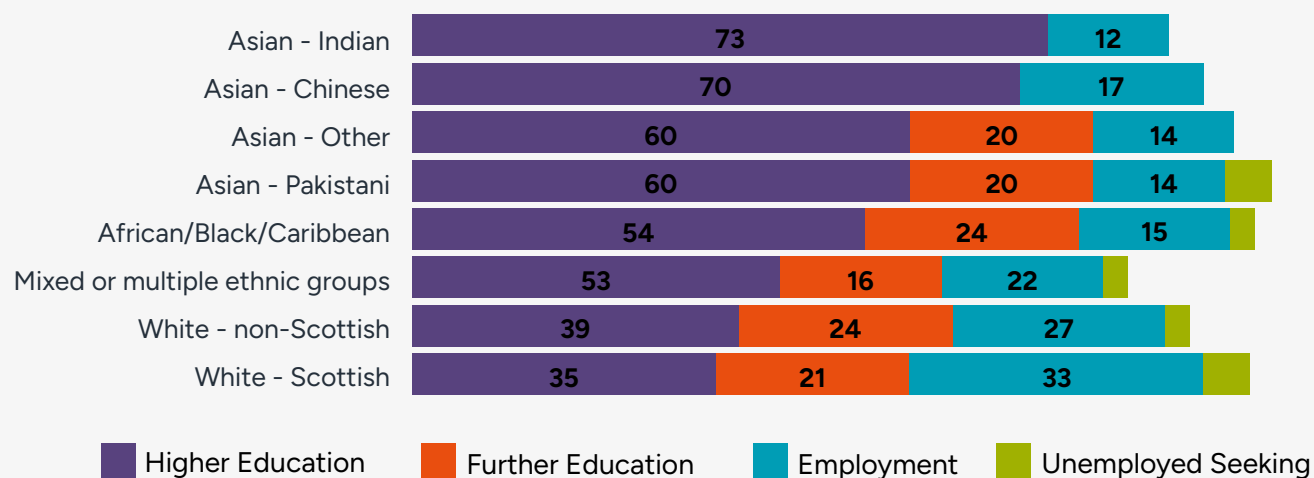
The **Annual Participation Measure**¹⁴⁷ shows that participation by those from minority ethnic groups was 3.6 percentage points higher than those identified as White. Those from minority ethnic groups were more likely to be in education (87.5% compared to those identified as White at 69.9%). Figures from the participation

measure demonstrate the dominance of education as a post 16+ choice for those from Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups.

School attainment levels are higher at SCQF Level 6 for all ethnic groups when compared to White – Scottish at 56%. Attainment data for 2022/23¹⁴⁸ shows that Asian-Chinese pupils continue to have high levels of attainment with 91% achieving one pass or more in a National Qualification at SCQF Level 6 or higher.

Minority ethnic groups are more likely to progress on to higher education than those from a White background, as shown in Figure 9.¹⁴⁹ Those from an Asian-Indian and Asian – Chinese background progress to higher education at the highest rates.

Figure 9. Pupil destinations by ethnicity, 2022/23 (%)



Source: Scottish Government (2024) Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations. [figures do not add to 100 due to small sample sizes in some categories]

¹⁴⁶ Scottish Government (2024). [Census Supplementary Statistics](#)

¹⁴⁷ SDS (2024). [Annual participation measure for 16-19 year olds in Scotland 2024](#)

¹⁴⁸ Scottish Government (2024). [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#)

¹⁴⁹ Scottish Government (2024). [Summary statistics for attainment and initial leaver destinations](#)

Figures for **Foundation Apprenticeships**¹⁵⁰ show that the proportion of FAs at SCQF L6, who self-identified as minority ethnic increased to 7.5% in 2021.

Gypsy/Travellers have the lowest educational attainment rates of all ethnic groups in Scotland.¹⁵¹ They have the lowest school attendance rates of any ethnic group and the highest school exclusion rates. Both factors impact on attainment at school leaving age. School exclusion data from Scottish Government shows that cases of exclusion for Gypsy/Traveller pupils for 2022/23 was 33.3 per thousand pupils compared to 18.3 per thousand for White-Scottish pupils.¹⁵² Many children in this ethnic group do not make the transition from primary to secondary school. Continuous mobility and bullying have been identified as major reasons preventing children from Gypsy/Traveller communities attending school.

Further and higher education

At **college** minority ethnic students account for 8.9% of students studying HE full time. The largest grouping within this figure is Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian at 4.2%. At college, the subjects with the highest proportion of BME students are Area Studies (also known as regional studies, an interdisciplinary field of research about a particular geographical region), Culture Studies and Languages and Literature.¹⁵³

At **university** minority ethnic students account for 12% of full-time first-degree entrants. Within this figure the highest grouping is Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian at 6%, followed by Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups at 2.6%. Subject choice at university is outlined in Table 1 and shows that medicine, law, computing and engineering are the most popular choices for minority ethnic students.

¹⁵⁰ SSDS (2023). [Foundation apprenticeship report](#)

¹⁵¹ EHRC (2023). [Equality and human rights monitor: Is Scotland Fairer?](#)

Table 1. Top ten subject areas at university by ethnicity, 2022/23

	Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	Black, African or Caribbean	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	Other ethnic group	Total BME	White
Medicine and dentistry	23%	3.4%	3.7%	4.2%	35%	64%
Law	10%	2.4%	3.2%	1.9%	18%	81%
Computing	8.8%	3.0%	2.9%	1.8%	16%	80%
Engineering and technology	8.3%	2.8%	3.1%	1.7%	16%	83%
Business and management	8.0%	2.8%	2.9%	1.0%	15%	83%
Subjects allied to medicine	6.1%	4.0%	2.2%	1.0%	13%	85%
Architecture, building and planning	4.7%	2.7%	2.7%	1.9%	12%	86%
Mathematical sciences	6.9%	1.0%	1.9%	1.3%	11%	88%
Combined and general studies	2.6%	2.3%	4.4%	1.7%	11%	88%
Physical sciences	5.8%	1.1%	2.1%	0.7%	9.6%	89%

¹⁵² Scottish Government (2024). [School exclusion statistics 2022/23](#)

¹⁵³ SFC (2024). [Report on Widening Access 2022/23](#)

Research from Engineering UK¹⁵⁴ highlights that a higher proportion of graduates from UK minority ethnic groups studied engineering and technology (28%) compared to all other subjects combined (24%). However, they highlight different trends across minority groups in the UK:

- a higher proportion of Asian or Asian British - Indian, Asian or Asian British - Pakistani, and 'other Asian backgrounds' graduates studied engineering and technology (4.6%, 3.9% and 3.6% respectively) compared to all other subjects combined
- Black/Black British (Caribbean) graduates were less likely to have studied engineering and technology (0.8%) compared to all other subjects (1.3%)
- over a quarter (28%) of male engineering and technology graduates were from a UK minority ethnic group, and this figure was higher amongst female engineering and technology graduates (31%).

Minority ethnic students have a higher uptake of **Science, Engineering, and Technology (SET)** subjects than those from White backgrounds. However, disparities exist in the uptake of SET subjects across ethnic groups. Chinese and Asian Indian students are more likely to receive a first / 2:1 SET degree than other minority ethnic students.¹⁵⁵

Minority ethnic representation is a persistent problem at **postgraduate** research level.¹⁵⁶ Barriers to minority ethnic representation in postgraduate research include students not learning about postgraduate study; not understanding the

application process; and feeling they would not be selected by a research-intensive university.¹⁵⁷

The proportion of minority ethnic students enrolled in UK HE in 2021/2022, drops from **28%** at first degree undergraduate level, to **24%** at taught postgraduate and **20%** at research postgraduate level.¹⁵⁸

There is a significant crossover between **ethnicity and social class** in terms of disadvantage. Minority ethnic students are more likely to come from socially deprived communities. More than a quarter of minority ethnic students in universities come from the most deprived areas, compared with 15% of White students.¹⁵⁹

Those from a **traveller background** face bullying and discrimination at every level of the education system, including prejudice at college and university.¹⁶⁰ However in England, the number of Gypsy/Traveller students starting their first degree at university in England has tripled. Latest figures by the Office for Students reveal that 1,430 Gypsy and Traveller students started their first degree in the academic year 2022/23, compared to 470 in 2021/22.¹⁶¹ Research suggests that this might be due to the fact that more Gypsies and Travellers are going to university and are becoming more confident about revealing their ethnic identity, whereas in the past prejudice and racism may have caused them to hide who they were.¹⁶²

Degree attainment differs by ethnic background with 86% of White British first-degree students graduating with a first / 2:1, compared to 77% of minority ethnic students.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁴ Engineering UK (2024). [Graduate outcomes – engineering and technology](#)

¹⁵⁵ Advance HE (2022). [Equality + Higher Education Students Statistical Report 2022](#)

¹⁵⁶ UK Council for Graduate Education (2020). [Access & Participation of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities in UK Postgraduate Research – Policy Briefing](#)

¹⁵⁷ Badrie, Rami, et. al. (2023) [Barriers to pursuing postgraduate research study among final year undergraduate minority ethnic students at a post-1992 UK university](#)

¹⁵⁸ Advance HE (2022). [Equality + Higher Education Students Statistical Report 2022](#)

¹⁵⁹ Scottish Government (2020). [Fair Access to Higher Education: Progress and Challenges](#)

¹⁶⁰ The Traveller Movement (2024). [Report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination \(CERD\) on the rights of Romani, Roma and Irish Traveller communities in the United Kingdom](#)

¹⁶¹ Office of Students (2024). [Official Statistics](#)

¹⁶² Doherty, Mike (2023). [Gypsy and Traveller students starting university doubles in a year – new government figures reveal](#)

¹⁶³ Advance HE (2022). [Equality and higher education](#)

When it comes to **access to top institutions**, White students, despite having the lowest levels of university attendance overall, have the second highest rate of attendance at these institutions, behind young people classifying their ethnicity as “mixed”. White students are overrepresented at these institutions in contrast with other universities and this has remained largely unchanged since 2010.¹⁶⁴

The estimated **returns to higher education** (the returns to undergraduate degrees) by socio-economic background and ethnicity shows that women from Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups have the highest returns, but Black Caribbean women have very low returns. For men, returns for Pakistani men are very high, while White British men have some of the lowest.¹⁶⁵

Minority ethnic students are less likely than White students to have spent time working in an area relevant to their course before starting university. Final year minority ethnic students were also less likely to have undertaken a placement and/or an internship, as part of their course.¹⁶⁶

In terms of **graduate outcomes**:

- 43% of graduates who are minority ethnic feel disadvantaged in the job application process compared to just 8% of White graduates.¹⁶⁷
- first degree female graduates from non-White backgrounds earn less than females from White backgrounds as well as male graduates from all backgrounds five years after graduation.¹⁶⁸
- White Scottish graduates are more likely than minority ethnic graduates to be in full time employment.¹⁶⁹
- in the UK, Black students are more likely to be unemployed two and a half years after completing a degree.¹⁷⁰
- Minority ethnic students (42%) are slightly less likely to be in full time employment after graduation, compared to their White counterparts (49%).¹⁷¹
- Minority ethnic students (8%) are more likely to be unemployed after graduation than White students (4%).¹⁷²

¹⁶⁴ The Sutton Trust (2023). [25 Years of University Access: how higher education has changed over time](#)

¹⁶⁵ Department of education (2021) [The returns to undergraduate degrees by socio-economic group and ethnicity](#)

¹⁶⁶ Britton, J. (2024). [The impact of higher education on labour market earnings](#)

¹⁶⁷ Prospects (2023). [Ethnic minority graduates five times more likely to feel job disadvantage than white counterparts](#)

¹⁶⁸ Scottish Government (2024). [Intersectional Evidence Review: Minority Ethnic Women's Experiences in Scotland](#)

¹⁶⁹ Scottish Government, (2024). [Scotland's Labour Market Insights: October 2024](#)

¹⁷⁰ UK Government (2024). [Work and study after higher education](#)

¹⁷¹ Advance HE (2022). [Equality + Higher Education Students Statistical Report 2022](#)

¹⁷² Advance HE (2022). [Equality + Higher Education Students Statistical Report 2022](#)

Labour market

Minority ethnic individuals do not receive the labour market advantages which should be expected when considering their positive educational outcomes. The **employment rate** of those from minority ethnic groups in Scotland is consistently lower than the White population. The employment rate for minority ethnic groups aged 16 to 64 was estimated at 62% in January to December 2023 compared to 76% for White groups.¹⁷³

The **minority ethnic employment rate gap** is the difference between the employment rates for minority ethnic groups and White groups aged 16 to 64. In 2023, the estimated gap between the employment rate for White groups compared with minority ethnic groups was 13.8 percentage points. The UK employment rate gap between White and minority ethnic women was estimated at 13.3 and 14.1 percentage points for minority ethnic men respectively. The biggest ethnicity employment rate gap was for those aged 16 to 24 (26.8 pp) followed by those aged 25 to 34 (13.5 pp).¹⁷⁴

Minority ethnic people are **over-represented in certain sectors**.¹⁷⁵ They are more likely to work in the Accommodation and Food Services sector than the White population. Minority ethnic individuals are disproportionately more likely to work in low-paying sectors and less likely to hold managerial or senior positions in business.

They are also more likely to be self-employed. Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnic groups are among the highest proportions in 'never worked' or long-term unemployed.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Scottish Government (2024). [Scotland's Labour Market Insights](#)

¹⁷⁴ Office for National Statistics (2023). [Labour Market in Regions of the UK](#)

¹⁷⁵ Skills Development Scotland (2025). [Commission on Race in Apprenticeships Report and Recommendations](#)

¹⁷⁶ Department of Education (2024). [Labour Market Outcomes: Ethnicity](#)

Research shows that minority ethnic young people are underrepresented in **Modern Apprenticeships**. It is suggested that more could be done to raise the esteem of apprenticeships in minority ethnic communities, using role models and emphasising apprenticeships as a route into professions as well as trades.¹⁷⁷ Data for 2024/25¹⁷⁸ shows that the proportion of MA starts self-identifying as minority ethnic was 4.9%, 1pp higher than the previous year. This is the highest proportion of minority ethnic starts recorded since SDS started to report on this characteristic.

Apprentice Voice: Minority ethnic Modern Apprentices

SDS Apprentice Voice¹⁷⁹ research reports that:

- just 3% of minority ethnic apprentices heard about Modern Apprenticeships from their parents or carers compared to 12% non-minority ethnic apprentices
- greater levels of family support were reported by non-minority ethnic MA during their training than minority ethnic apprentices (31% compared to 18%)
- both minority ethnic and non-minority ethnic apprentices reported high levels of satisfaction with their MA and were likely to recommend to others
- a smaller proportion of minority ethnic MA completers were employed full time following their apprenticeship compared to non-minority ethnic completers (72% compared to 86%).

¹⁷⁷ Skills Development Scotland (2025). [Commission on Race in Apprenticeships Report and Recommendations](#)

¹⁷⁸ SDS (2024). [Modern Apprenticeship statistics, up to end Q2 2024.25](#)

¹⁷⁹ SDS (2023). [Apprentice Voice](#)

Young people from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be in **low paid, insecure employment** than their White peers, including a higher likelihood of being on a zero-hours contract and an increased need to have two jobs.¹⁸⁰

In Scotland, in 2019, **the ethnicity pay gap** was 10.3%.¹⁸¹ There has been no sustained progress in reducing Scotland's ethnicity pay gap over recent years.¹⁸² White British people, White Irish people and Indian people were more likely to work in high-pay occupations in 2016/17, while Black people and those in the Other White group were more likely to work in low-pay occupations.¹⁸³

Results from the Scottish Household Survey¹⁸⁴ show minority ethnic people are more likely to have experienced **discrimination in the workplace**, with 17% of minority ethnic respondents stating they had experienced discrimination in the last 12 months compared to 8% of White respondents. For Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people, The Traveller Movement¹⁸⁵ reported that discrimination in employment manifested itself in several ways, including discrimination in recruitment and career progression, losing a job after revealing their identity, and hiding ethnicity.

Research into experiences at work in the UK shows that 75% of women of colour have experienced one or more types of **racism in the workplace**, with 61% of women changing something about themselves to 'fit in' at work. Women of colour also report blocks to their progression at work by managers, with associated impacts on motivation levels.¹⁸⁶ In addition, a 2024 report by the TUC¹⁸⁷ shows that women of colour face sexual harassment in the workplace. Around two thirds (65%) of respondents who participated in the survey reported experiencing some kind of sexual harassment, with high levels of unwelcome verbal sexual advances, unwanted touching, or sexual jokes at work.

Recruitment processes can also make it harder for some minority ethnic people to enter the workplace, as there may be an under-recognition among employers of minority ethnic employees' skills and experience, reducing their chances of employment or further progression when in work.¹⁸⁸ Progression for minority ethnic individuals can be restricted if progression is through informal networks, if there is a lack of role models or mentors at higher levels within organisations who might provide support and advice, or if there is a gap between equality and diversity policies and practice in the workplace.¹⁸⁹ International research evidence also suggests that people with English names on their CVs receive more positive responses from recruiters than those with non-English sounding names.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁰ Learning and Work Institute (2022). [Rapid evidence review: minority ethnic youth employment outcomes](#)

¹⁸¹ ONS (2019). [Ethnic Pay Gaps](#)

¹⁸² Scottish Government (2023). [Analysis of Labour Market Outcomes of Scotland's Minority Ethnic Population](#)

¹⁸³ EHRC (2018). [Is Scotland Fairer?](#)

¹⁸⁴ Scottish Government (2019). [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#)

¹⁸⁵ [The Traveller Movement \(2017\)](#)

¹⁸⁶ Fawcett (2022). [Broken ladders: The myth of meritocracy for women of colour in the workplace](#)

¹⁸⁷ TUC (2024). [Black women's experience of sexual harassment in the workplace](#)

¹⁸⁸ Joseph Rowntree Foundations (2013). [In-work Poverty, ethnicity and workplace cultures](#)

¹⁸⁹ Joseph Rowntree Foundations (2013). [In-work Poverty, ethnicity and workplace cultures](#)

¹⁹⁰ Adamovic, M. (2022). [The resume bias: How names and ethnicity influence employment opportunities](#)

Research by Close the Gap,¹⁹¹ highlights the complex **intersection of inequalities faced by minority ethnic women in the labour market**. Their research highlights that many minority ethnic women face racial discrimination and bias in the labour market which negatively impacts on their outcomes. Minority ethnic women are more likely to face microaggressions from colleagues including being treated as less intelligent and stereotypical assumptions about the positions they hold. In addition, CRER¹⁹² highlight that minority ethnic women in Scotland continue to face barriers in accessing the labour market, including racist and sexist attitudes and discrimination.

¹⁹¹ Close The Gap (2019). *Still Not Visible, Research on Black and Minority Ethnic Women's Experiences of Employment in Scotland*

¹⁹² CRER (2020). *Ethnicity and Poverty in Scotland 2020. Analysis and Reflection on the impact of Covid-19*

9. Religion or belief

Key points

- Limited evidence is available about religion or belief across education and the labour market.
- Some Muslims perceive that Islamophobia has a negative impact on the educational outcomes of Muslims in Scotland.
- A religious (Muslim) penalty exists in the UK labour market.
- Those with religious faith or belief can find it hard to express their religion in UK workplaces.

Religion or belief across Scotland

The **2022 Census data for Scotland** shows that the number of people describing themselves as having no religion has increased to 51% (up from 37% in 2011). However, there are still substantial numbers of people in Scotland identifying with a religious faith.¹⁹³

Data availability

Schools and colleges do not routinely collect information on religion. Scotland's 2022 census results provide useful data on religion and belief.

¹⁹³ Scotland's census (2022). [Religion](#)

¹⁹⁴ Scottish Government (2022). [The number of schools of different faiths in Scotland: FOI release](#)

¹⁹⁵ The Scottish Parliament (2023). [Scotland's Islamophobia – update 2023](#)

School

Limited evidence exists in relation to the religion or belief of school pupils in Scotland. Scottish Government states that as of April 2022, most schools (85%) in Scotland are non-denominational. For the remaining schools identifying as having faith elements, 15% are Roman Catholic, 0.3% inter-denominational, 0.1% Episcopalian and 0.04% Jewish.¹⁹⁴

Findings from an inquiry into **Islamophobia** in Scotland included that 77% of Muslim respondents felt that Islamophobia had an impact on the educational outcomes of Muslims (and individuals perceived to be Muslim through dress or appearance) in Scotland.¹⁹⁵

Further and higher education

The percentage of students in HE institutions across Scotland not identifying with any religion has been declining from 60% in 2019/20 to 55% in 2022/23. Christians (29%) are the second largest group after no religion, followed by Muslim students at 7% and Hindus at 4%.¹⁹⁶ For students in Scottish universities not identifying with any religion, 25% obtained first class honours degrees, compared to 21% of Christian students and 13% of Muslim students.¹⁹⁷

A study into the experiences of 14 Muslim PhD students in UK universities provided insights of the challenges faced by these students. These included islamophobia, racism (overt and covert) and marginalisation. Students described how these negatively impacted on their academic performance and wellbeing.

¹⁹⁶ HESA (2024). [Who's studying in HE?](#)

¹⁹⁷ HESA (2024). [What are HE students' progression rates and qualifications?](#)

Microaggressions faced within the university environment and feeling unsupported and disconnected from the doctoral community were also reported as common experiences.¹⁹⁸

The evidence suggests that Muslim students studying in UK universities are experiencing increased levels of **Islamophobia**. Examples included hate incidents reported on campus, being 'othered' in university spaces and microaggressions in university accommodation.¹⁹⁹

Focus groups held with **Jewish students studying at universities in Scotland** (St Andrews, Edinburgh and Glasgow) reported that they felt the amount of casual antisemitic comments made around or towards them was greater than their peers relayed to them about their experiences in England and Wales. Jewish students in Scotland felt that this was due to a lack of education in schools about the Jewish community or faith and antisemitism.²⁰⁰

Labour market

Limited evidence is available on the relationship between employment and religion or belief. However, evidence suggests that there is a religious (Muslim) penalty in the UK labour market. Muslims experience the greatest faith penalty compared to other religious groups even after accounting for other factors such as education and age that impact on employment.²⁰¹ Muslim men and women are among those with highest risk of being unemployed or inactive and are workers from religious minorities are more likely to be in insecure employment compared to non-religious workers.²⁰² However, the proportion of Muslim workers in highly paid occupations has grown from 31% in 2010/11 to 45% in 2019/20,

so that they now make up a significantly higher proportion than those with no religion.²⁰³

Research examining **religious expression and discrimination in the workplace** found that people from all groups found it hard to express their faith at work, suggesting that people with religious beliefs may feel unable to be their authentic selves at work. Individuals reported feeling uncomfortable wearing clothing or symbols related to their religion in the workplace, and many said that they had experienced exclusion and discrimination at work due to their faith. A total of 47% of respondents felt uncomfortable discussing religious festivals that they celebrate with work colleagues, with 19% stating that their requests for annual leave to celebrate religious holidays or festivals had been rejected by managers.²⁰⁴

A survey and interviews carried out exploring the experiences of Jews and Muslims in UK workplaces found key themes around religious identity at work, experiences of discrimination and varying levels of organisational support. Muslims generally felt more comfortable identifying as a Muslim at work compared to Jewish individuals. While both groups reported regular microaggressions at work, Jewish individuals reported a slightly higher rate of incidents. Both groups talked of similar desires for organisations to take actions to foster inclusivity, with an emphasis on creating a safe and more understanding environment in relation to religion at work.²⁰⁵

¹⁹⁸ Mahmud, A. (2024). [Exploring the experiences of Muslim doctoral students in UK higher education](#)

¹⁹⁹ Allen, C. (2023). [Everyday experiences of Islamophobia in university spaces](#)

²⁰⁰ Parliamentary Taskforce on Antisemitism in HE (2023). [Understanding Jewish experience in HE](#)

²⁰¹ Sweida-Metwally (2022). [Does the Muslim penalty in the British labour market dissipate after accounting for so-called sociocultural attitudes?](#)

²⁰² Sweida-Metwally, S. (2022). [Does the Muslim penalty in the British labour market dissipate after accounting for so-called sociocultural attitudes?](#)

²⁰³ EHRC (2023). [Is Scotland fairer?](#)

²⁰⁴ Pearn Kandola (2023). [Religion at work](#)

²⁰⁵ Pearn Kandola (2024). [Antisemitism and Islamophobia at work](#)

Intersectionality: Religion, Race and Ethnicity

People of all groups find it difficult to express their faith at work for fear of exclusion and discrimination. Studies show that Muslims are more likely to express their religion in the workplace compared to Jews. This is partly because their religion is more identifiable by name and some aspects of dress. However, Jewish workers might want to hide their religious identity because of previous experiences with antisemitism. Both Muslims and Jews have a generally positive feeling that their religion impacts positively on their professional relationships, though a small percentage feel it has a negative effect. The ongoing Israel-Gaza war makes it difficult for Jews and Muslims to openly express their religious identity as they worry about discrimination and lack of organisational support.²⁰⁶

10. Sexual orientation

Key points

- Bullying and harassment is a feature of the education experience for many lesbian, bisexual and gay young people which can impact on outcomes.
- There has been some improvement in representation of LGBTI issues in the school curriculum.
- Bullying and harassment is experienced by many lesbian, bisexual and gay workers which can have significant negative impacts.

Sexual orientation across the Scottish population²⁰⁷

The 2022 Scotland census indicates that:

- of the 16+ population 4% were LGB+
- around two in every five LGB+ people identified as bisexual and a similar number of people identified as gay or lesbian
- the number of LGB+ people varies across age groups. There are more LGB+ people in younger age groups than in older groups. Almost half of bisexual people and a quarter of gay or lesbian people were aged 16 to 24.

Definitions and data availability

Across the literature different definitions of sexual orientation are used and can also include Trans. When reporting on the evidence we use the definition used in the source document.

- LGBTI refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex.
- LGBT refers lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans.
- LGBT+ refers to the full LGBT+ community including, for example non-binary individuals.
- LGBTQ+ refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual and gender minority identities people.
- LGB refers to lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals.

Data availability is one of the key issues in relation to reporting on evidence for sexual orientation. Sexual orientation has been included in all major equality legislation for the past decade; however, there is a lack of evidence in relation to employment and education. What evidence does exist tends to be qualitative or from small scale surveys. It should be noted that even when surveys collect data on sexual orientation numbers may not be an accurate reflection of the population due to reluctance to disclose sexual orientation.

School

At school, evidence highlights the negative impact bullying has on future education and career plans.

A report by LGBT Youth Scotland²⁰⁸ indicates that LGBTI young people's educational experiences have not improved significantly compared with previous years. The report highlights that:

- only 10% of those who participated in the research rated the experience of school as 'Good', with 44% rating it as 'OK', 46% of respondents rated it as 'Bad'
- 70% of LGBTI young people think homophobia, biphobia and transphobia had a negative effect on their educational experience and attainment. Some have left education, because of homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia
- there are moves to ensure better representation of LGBTI issues in the curriculum.

Further and higher education

Participation in higher education by sexual orientation is now collected and provides an indication of representation at university. Table 2 outlines first degree entrants by sexual orientation for 2022/23.

²⁰⁸ LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). [Education Report](#)

²⁰⁹ LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). [Education Report](#)

²¹⁰ LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). [Education Report](#)

Table 2. Scottish domiciled full-time first degree entrants by sexual orientation

Sexual Orientation	2022/23
Bisexual	2,480
Gay or lesbian	985
Heterosexual or straight	21,355
Prefer not to say	1,820
Other sexual orientation	430
Not available	5,690
All	32,760

Source: SFC (2024) Report on widening access, data tables

Homophobia is still an issue in further and higher education. For example, 70% of those who participated in the LGBT Youth Scotland survey felt that homophobia, biphobia and transphobia had a negative effect on their educational experience.²⁰⁹ In terms of support for LGBTI individuals at university, 56% of participants said their university experience was 'good', 42% selected 'OK', and 3% had a 'bad' university experience. The college experience for LGBTI young people was more positive than school, with 32% of participants rating this as 'good', 59% rating the experience as 'OK', and 9% said it was a 'bad' experience.

Research suggests that supportive staff can make a real difference to the experience of LGBTQ+ individuals in education.²¹⁰ Having someone to turn to can be a source of reassurance, support and can give visible representation to LGBTQ+ people.

When continuing into the labour market, most LGBTQ+ students and graduates expressed their desire to be open at work, emphasising the significance of an environment enabling authenticity and pride.²¹¹

Those who declared themselves as being LGBTQ+ were under-represented in some areas of STEM education, research, and employment settings.²¹²

One of the barriers around LGBTQ+ that educators face is the fear of “getting it wrong” while trying to support LGBTQ+ students in a learning environment.²¹³

Labour market

An evidence gap exists in relation to sexual orientation in work. However, survey and qualitative research provide some insights.

LGBTQ+ professionals may not feel safe and comfortable in their workplaces.²¹⁴ Those who had experienced bullying at work reported it had negatively impacted their mental health. LGBTQ+ professionals also report that homophobia, biphobia or transphobia had negatively impacted their employment opportunities.²¹⁵

A 2024 report by the Trade Union Congress (TUC) highlights that:²¹⁶

- LGBTQ+ employees have experienced at least one form of bullying or harassment at work in the last five years.
- most LGBTQ+ individuals are not open with anyone at work about their sexual orientation.
- due to workplace discrimination, exclusion and harassment, LGBTQ+ employees show poorer average employment outcomes than heterosexual colleagues and slower career progression.
- homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are driving some LGBTQ+ people from the workplace. As a result, some have considered leaving or have left their job due to discrimination.

²¹¹ LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). [Education Report](#)

²¹² House of Commons (2024). [Diversity and Inclusion in STEM](#).

²¹³ Educational Institute of Scotland (2023). [Taking pride in teaching: the power of LGBT+ education](#)

²¹⁴ Mygwork (2024). [LGBTQ+Mental Health in the Workplace Survey 2024](#)

²¹⁵ LGBT Youth Scotland (2023). [Education Report](#)

²¹⁶ TUC (2024). [Bullying, harassment and discrimination of LGBT people in the workplace](#)

11. Trans (gender reassignment)

Key points

- Trans students report high incidences of bullying and harassment at school which impact on outcomes.
- Trans people face barriers in work and education which impact negatively on participation and outcomes.
- Many transgender people are likely to have experienced harassment and bullying at work.
- Trans and non-binary individuals face challenges to their wellbeing, specifically their mental health.

Definitions and data availability

Transgender or trans is used in this report as terms for those whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth. We recognise that individuals may use other terms and support everyone's right to choose these. Gender reassignment is the term used in the Equality Act 2010.

There is limited data that provides an accurate picture of the transgender population in Scotland or the UK, including those who have a nonbinary gender identity.

Trans population in Scotland²¹⁷

- According to Scotland's 2022 Census 19,990 people reported being trans or having a trans history - about 0.44% of people aged 16 and over.
- Almost 45% of trans people in Scotland identify as non-binary.

School

Limited data is available on trans young people at school in Scotland and the UK in general, resulting in an evidence gap in relation to their experiences and attainment.

Trans young people experience high levels of bullying and harassment at school and at higher levels than LGB young people.

Research by LGBT Youth Scotland²¹⁸ indicates that generally Scotland is a good place for LGBTQ+ young people to live with 65% of respondents agreeing that it is a good place to live. This figure is slightly lower for trans participants at 61%. Some participants suggest that increasing LGBTQ+ education and representation, both within schools and more widely across society, would ease the process of coming out for LGBTQ+ people. Despite this general positive outlook, Trans and LGBTQ participants shared their experiences of discrimination and LGBTQ+-related abuse ranging from individual cases in educational environment, to systemic issues faced within healthcare or legal situations.

²¹⁷ Scottish Government (2024). [Evidence Review: Non-Binary People's Experiences in Scotland](#)

²¹⁸ LGBT Youth Scotland (2022). [Life In Scotland For LGBT Young People](#)

Research highlights that 45% of young people interviewed in the UK who identify with minority sexuality categories and 39% of those identifying as transgender reported unfair treatment or bullying by peers based on their sexual orientation and trans status respectively.²¹⁹ Evidence from English secondary schools indicates that young people who are trans are less likely to report enjoying school (37% compared to 57% of heterosexual respondents) or that doing well at school means a lot to them (71% compared to 83% of heterosexual respondents).²²⁰

Further and higher education

Limited data is collected on trans students at college or university. However, data from Scottish Funding Council²²¹ shows that:

- at **college** (full time Scottish home students studying 160+ hours) 3,900 students are recorded as having a trans status.
- at **university** (full time Scottish home students) 275 students are recorded as having a trans status.

At the point of applying to higher education, trans and non-binary people may face additional challenges.²²² Trans applicants may be applying to university with lower grades than their fellow students, and both trans and non-binary applicants consider themselves less prepared for higher education. Trans and non-binary students face financial challenges during their studies for a multitude of reasons, including estrangement, paying for private medical care, and concerns over accessing institutional hardship funds.

Research on the experiences of trans and non-binary students in higher education shows trans and non-binary students experience higher levels of loneliness than their fellow students.²²³ For example, 56% of respondents in the report feel 'rejected by others', compared with 26% of their peers who are not trans.

An evidence review on the experiences of non-binary students attending a Scottish University highlights the direct experiences of queerphobic bullying and harassment in halls of residence.²²⁴ The study shows that single-sex residencies and toilets and the complex process of changing their gender on university systems is a challenge for them. It indicates that non-binary students are likely to have unique experiences of discrimination compared to binary trans due to the lack of understanding of non-binary gender categories, a lack of gender-neutral spaces, and legal contexts presented to them.

Some transgender students are less likely to complete their course in higher education, or may take longer to do so, than students who are not trans. Those who do complete their course, however, achieve around the same grades as students who are not trans or non-binary. Despite this, trans and non-binary graduates are employed at less senior levels and at lower salaries than students who are not trans or non-binary.²²⁵

²¹⁹ Young Lives Young Futures (2023). [Schools for All Young people's experiences of alienation in the English secondary school system](#)

²²⁰ Young Lives Young Futures (2023). [Schools for All Young people's experiences of alienation in the English secondary school system](#)

²²¹ SFC (2024). [Report on widening access, data tables](#)

²²² Scottish Government (2024). [Evidence Review: Non-Binary People's Experiences in Scotland](#)

²²³ Freeman and Stephenson (2024). [Trans and non-binary student experiences in higher education](#)

²²⁴ Scottish Government (2024). [Evidence Review: Non-Binary People's Experiences in Scotland](#)

²²⁵ Freeman and Stephenson (2024). [Trans and non-binary student experiences in higher education](#)

Labour market

Research highlights that trans and non-binary people have higher rates of unemployment than the general population and are more likely to be economically inactive.²²⁶ This may be due to discrimination during recruitment processes and from colleagues, employers, and customers after employment, making it difficult for trans and non-binary people to find and maintain employment.

Many transgender people experience harassment and bullying at work. Evidence suggests they may experience poor service from HR departments, a lack of understanding of trans issues by managers and little support when faced with discrimination and harassment. Consequently, they experience restricted job choice and reduced progression at work.²²⁷

Evidence shows that trans people who are in employment still face issues around inclusivity. The Scottish Trans Report shows that transgender and non-binary people are worried that their gender identity would not be respected at work as they experience the discomfort of being called by the wrong pronoun.²²⁸

Transgender and non-binary individuals are impacted by low pay as they experience more extreme pay gaps.²²⁸ Trans women are particularly at risk of low pay.²³⁰

Some of the barriers to accessing employment include feeling unable to apply to jobs because of prejudice, application forms excluding non-binary identities, difficulties obtaining references, proof of qualifications matching gender and their new name, a lack of awareness and transphobia from interview panel members; and feeling unable to be open about a trans identity when applying for jobs.²³¹

Scottish Trans suggests that creating an atmosphere of inclusion and acceptance, enabling trans and non-binary people to relax and feel comfortable at work without fear of exclusion or discrimination, will support them to focus on their job and progress in their career. This can be achieved through organisations having clear statements of support for trans and non-binary workers.²³²

226 Scottish Trans (2024). [Scottish Trans and Non-binary Report](#)

227 Drydakis, N. (2024). [Employment discrimination against transgender women in England](#)

228 Scottish Trans (2024). [Scottish Trans and Non-binary Report](#)

229 Living Wage (2022). [It's a fundamental issue of social justice Gendered Intelligence on low pay, precarity and good work for trans people](#)

230 Living Wage (2022). [It's a fundamental issue of social justice Gendered Intelligence on low pay, precarity and good work for trans people](#)

231 Scottish Government (2024). [Evidence Review: Non-Binary People's Experiences in Scotland](#)

232 Scottish Trans (2024). [Scottish Trans and Non-binary Report](#)

Appendix 1. Data availability

Table 3 below outlines the availability of administrative and survey data presented in this review and shows those areas where there is a lack of data.

Table 3. Availability of administrative and social survey data by protected group

	Age	Disability	Care Experience	Sex	Trans	Pregnancy and maternity	Race	Religion or belief	Sexual orientation
School pupils	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Subject choice school	✓			✓					
School attainment	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
School qualifications	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
College population	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Subject choice college	✓	✓		✓			✓		
University population	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Subject choice university	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Apprenticeships	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Employment	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Unemployment	✓	✓		✓			✓		
Occupation	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Industry of employment	✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	

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