Skills Development Scotland

SDS Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report

2021 – 2025 update

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Foreword

This report showcases the progress in mainstreaming equality and diversity at Skills Development Scotland not only in how we operate as an organisation but also the ways in which we support Scotland's people, communities and businesses.

Since our equality outcomes were published in 2021, we have achieved a great deal, despite working in a challenging and uncertain external environment. There have been continued increases in minority ethnic, disabled and Care Experienced apprenticeship starts, with the highest ever number recorded for each of these three groups.

In partnership with Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) we also produced three reports to drive improvements in apprenticeships focusing on gender, race and care-experience. I'm grateful to our broad range of industry partners who devoted a great deal of time and energy in the development of these reports.

I also want to thank our colleagues for the commitment they continue to show in ensuring that equality and diversity is firmly embedded in the foundations of the services they deliver for the people and businesses of Scotland.

I'm proud of the passion they show daily for supporting and helping our customers and of the positive impacts their efforts have on people's lives.

Our organisational commitments to equality, diversity, inclusion, and to tackling poverty, are embedded throughout our **Strategic Plan**. This report highlights the progress made against the equality outcomes we set in 2021, focussing on activity since our last report in 2023. It details evidence and analysis of our performance against each equality outcome and provides examples of activities.

As we look towards the next phase of this activity we will continue to provide evidence, and to analyse and evaluate our progress so we can best serve the people, communities and businesses of Scotland.

Damien Yeates
Chief Executive, Skills Development Scotland

Contents

In this report, the term 'minority ethnic' is used wherever possible and when referring to people from a Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic group, in line with reporting official statistics. We recognise that any one term will not resonate with everyone and we support everyone's right to define themselves. However, for consistency with previous years, 'BME' and 'BAME' are used where these terms were referenced for reporting purposes.

1. Introduction

About Skills Development Scotland

Skills Development Scotland (SDS) is the national skills agency. Our ambition is that skills contribute to a thriving, productive and inclusive Scotland.

Collaborating extensively, we work to deliver our vision for an agile, dynamic, and employer-led skills and careers ecosystem which enables all people to develop the skills, adaptive resilience, and personal agency to thrive in a vibrant and inclusive labour market.

Through intelligence-led delivery of Scotland's Career Service, apprenticeships and other learning and skills interventions, and the sharing of expertise and insight, we aim to inspire and enable people and businesses to develop the right skills for a changing world. In doing so, we aim to generate the change that will lead to inclusive growth, greater productivity, a more prosperous and skilled workforce, and a fairer, more equal society.

Further details on SDS's strategic approach and operational activities can be found in our **Strategic Plan 2022-27**.

Education and skills reform

The Scottish Government is progressing its education reform programme following several independent reviews, including the **Independent Review of the Skills Delivery Landscape** and **Purpose and Principles for Post-School Education, Research and Skills**. During this time, the Scottish Government reform has affected SDS's ability to implement improvements to apprenticeship delivery. In 2025, the Scottish Government announced its decision to consolidate all post-school funding provision within the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). The Tertiary Education and Training Bill sets out the legislative changes required. SDS is expected to continue to deliver our responsibilities for National Training Programmes until mid to late 2026.

Successive budget cuts have meant that a range of different programmes, such as Individual Training Accounts and the National Transition Training Fund, have been stopped. Beyond our core programmes, our ability to effect change has been reduced. Further decisions made by the Scottish Government will impact SDS and the products and services it delivers. We will continue working to enable all people to develop the skills, adaptive resilience, and personal agency needed in the labour market during this period of uncertainty and change.

Our responsibilities as a public body

This Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report (or 'Mainstreaming Report') provides an update on progress made against the equality outcomes we set for 2021-25. It demonstrates how, through a wide range of policies, initiatives, and continuous improvement activities, SDS is working to embed equality and diversity throughout our organisation and meet our responsibilities as a public sector body.

As set out in the Equality Act 2010 public sector organisations, including SDS, have a duty to have due regard when carrying out their public functions as a service provider, policy maker and an employer, with a need to: eliminate discrimination; advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations. In addition to this, as a listed authority in The Specific Duties (Scotland) Regulations 2012 SDS has a duty to:

- report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty

- publish equality outcomes and report progress

- equality impact assess and review policies and practices

- gather and use employee information

- publish gender pay gap information

- publish statements on equal pay

- publish occupational segregation information in relation to gender, race and disability

- consider award criteria in relation to public procurement

- consider other matters, as specified from time to time by Scottish Ministers

- publish in an accessible format.

This, our seventh Mainstreaming Report, fulfils our reporting duties under these regulations for 2025; and in line with these requirements, our employee information, and pay gap information are published in Annex A and B of this document. Our new equality outcomes are published alongside this report in our **Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report 2025-29**.

In addition to this core equality legislation, a range of other Scottish Government strategies and policies impact and inform our work on equality. We are also mindful of the specific requests of public bodies listed in our annual Letter of Guidance, and of possible future obligations on SDS from recent or anticipated publications.

Our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion is embedded across all our goals in our **Strategic Plan 2022-27**.

2. Our approach to mainstreaming

Our ambition is to take an inclusive and intersectional[1] approach, where possible. This covers groups or experience not specifically covered by the Equality Act 2010, but where people may also experience poorer outcomes, either individually or in combination with one or more protected characteristics. This includes, but is not limited to, individuals who are Care Experienced and those with lived experience[2] of poverty. In addition, our approach is based on continuous improvement, building on the learning SDS has gained through investment in equality and diversity and previous plans, including the Apprenticeship Equality Action Plan. This section provides detail of our continuing approach to mainstreaming within SDS, including information on:

- mainstreaming equality throughout SDS

- governance

- policy and service development

- procurement

- development of our workforce

- marketing and communications.

Mainstreaming Equality at SDS

A Team SDS approach has been essential for embedding equality since it is woven throughout our goals in the SDS Strategic Plan 2022-27. Delivering SDS Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Outcomes is taken forward by colleagues from across the organisation. A review of SDS equality, diversity, and inclusion working groups was undertaken in 2023 to increase their impact on the business. As a result, the Equality Programme Board was established as the group with senior responsibility for equality across service delivery and as an employer. The group acts as an oversight board in relation to the Equality Act 2010, Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and Islands (Scotland) Act 2018, along with monitoring and sharing good practice in mainstreaming equality. Our employee networks provide a platform to highlight and communicate key equality information throughout the business and provide a platform to allow consultation and involvement, and effective employee voice. These groups also have representation on the Equality Programme Board.

We use the social model of disability[3] to inform our actions and approach and remain committed to proactively addressing disadvantages faced by anyone on their learning and career journey.

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1 **EHRC** describe intersectionality as "the relationship between overlapping social identities and protected characteristics".

2 **Lived experience** refers to knowledge acquired through direct, first-hand and personal experience.

3 The Scottish Accessible Information Forum states that "through the social model, disability is understood as an unequal relationship within a society in which the needs of people with impairments are often given little or no consideration. People with impairments are disabled by the fact that they are excluded from participation within the mainstream of society as a result of physical, organisational and attitudinal barriers. These barriers prevent them from gaining equal access to information, education, employment and social/ recreational opportunities".

SDS has worked proactively with Scottish Government, who are responsible for appointing the SDS Board, for several years to improve its diversity and gender balance. We achieved greater than 50% female representation on our non-executive Board in 2018 and have sustained this position into 2025, with 56% of current board members being female.

Governance

Our Board and Committees consider equality and diversity in setting SDS's strategic direction, reviewing performance and good governance of the organisation. Since the publication of our last mainstreaming report, the Committee Chairs' Equality Forum (CCEF) continues to further mainstream equality in Board and Committee business. Board Committee Chairs meet annually with the Board Equality Champion and executive leads for equality and diversity to review equality matters identified at Committee meetings.

Furthermore, we have aligned executive reporting to our Board and Committees with our SDS Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Outcomes and have a specific agenda item to capture equality matters arising at each Board and Committee meeting. In 2023 and 2024 equality and diversity spotlight sessions were held at the Audit and Risk Committee, on the Integrated Equality Impact Assessment for Migration to Local Employability Hubs, and the Remuneration and Human Resources Committee, on equality and diversity highlights from our staff survey results.

Policy and service development

We aim to complete an Integrated Equality Impact Assessment (IEIA) (see section 3d) on any new, or significant changes to existing policies, products or services within SDS.

The number of IEIAs published, including an Islands assessment, during this plan is shown below:

Year	Number of IEIAs published
2023	13
2024	7

SDS provide services to island communities, and we consider their needs when we develop services through the IEIA process, which includes Island Community Impact Assessments. A range of resources have been developed to support colleagues in completing the assessments which ensure the needs of all groups are considered, including Care Experienced people.

Focused engagement with external equality stakeholder organisations informs the development of our services and equality outcomes. We have taken a national approach to equality stakeholder engagement, which includes our equality Focal Point Groups with third sector organisations. This recognises the need to take a Team Scotland approach to creating effective partnerships with stakeholders representing equality groups across Scotland and to ensure that evidence and advice is actively considered in reaching our objectives and setting equality outcomes. We have been developing a new, sustainable target operating model as part of our Transform 27 programme. As part of this, we consulted with our equality Focal Point Groups on the proposed changes to our service delivery to ensure equalities are embedded in our decision-making.

Procurement

SDS works to adhere with Public Contracts Regulations and the Equality Act in our procurement practices and seeks to address underrepresentation, where possible. Any award criteria and contract performance conditions must, in accordance with the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations, be related and proportionate to the subject matter of the contract or framework agreement. The inclusion of award criteria and contract performance conditions is assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure that full consideration is given to the needs of, and likely impact on, all those who will be affected by the contract. The decision to include equality-related selection criteria takes into account the subject matter of the contract. Checks are made if an IEIA has been completed or is required as part of the procurement process.

Following earlier trialling of the approach, from 1 April 2021, SDS has been applying Fair Work First criteria to procurement for all training programmes, grants, funding streams and public contracts deemed appropriate in line with published guidance.

Development of our workforce

SDS aims to be an employer of choice, with a highly motivated, engaged, and productive workforce who take responsibility for their own personal development, wellbeing and fulfilment at work. We are committed to enabling fulfilling working lives, through our demonstration of fair work practices. SDS is dedicated to equality of opportunity for colleagues within our organisation, including a commitment to support 21 hours (pro rata) of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) each year for each member of staff. Mandatory CPD on equality and diversity includes equality and diversity essentials for all colleagues and managing diversity

e-learning and a managing equality and diversity workshop for people managers. 'It's About Race' Training sessions have continued to be delivered to colleagues by the Diversity Trust. Every employee has a digital personal learning record which they can use to record their development activities. This supports informed discussions with their manager, as part of our 'My Contribution' approach to managing development and performance. Details on the average employee annual CPD undertaken, disaggregated by protected characteristic are given in the tables in Annex A. We make a considerable commitment to the sponsorship of employees to undertake relevant professional qualifications. The focus of this training remains on qualifications in Career Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), particularly to support new entrants to the sector.

Marketing and communications

Equality, diversity and inclusion have been important themes in our communications and marketing activity. Our approach at the start of the reporting period was to mainstream diversity and inclusion across all our communications channels and marketing materials. This included use of photography, representation, case study selection, messaging, and ensuring the highest standards of accessibility. Communications support for SDS interventions has included media handling, event management, promotional resources, web and social media content, and colleague engagement. Specific interventions included our work in promoting equality, diversity and inclusion across the career service, apprenticeships, in targeted sectors, and through support for partner activity. Recent budget pressures have restricted spending on marketing activity across the public sector. As a result, we have been unable to undertake targeted campaign work in the way that we have done previously.

3. Progress against our Equality Outcomes for 2021-2025

In our fifth Mainstreaming Report we set out the five equality outcomes we would focus our efforts on achieving over the period 2021 – 25. The following section highlights some of the key activity that has taken place since our last report in 2023. Examples are illustrative of the range of work we have carried out to progress our equality outcomes. SDS's five equality outcomes are:

Equality Outcome 1	Page 10

People with lived experience of poverty, and from protected characteristic groups known to face inequality, have increased participation and improved progression in learning and employment.

Equality Outcome 2	Page 18

Women and girls can access and sustain learning and careers which reflect their skills and interests, enabled by the adoption of gender sensitive approaches from employers and key influencers.

Equality Outcome 3	Page 24

Lived experience of people from protected characteristic groups is a fundamental component of the design and development of SDS services, improving their customer experience and outcomes.

Equality Outcome 4	Page 32

Businesses are aware of the benefits of diversity and fair work practices and increasingly adopt and embed them, improving the wellbeing of people from protected characteristic groups.

Equality Outcome 5	Page 39

SDS benefits from increased diversity throughout our workforce, particularly in relation to gender, race and disability, and colleagues with protected characteristics feel heard, respected and fulfilled at work.

Equality Outcome 1: People with lived experience of poverty, and from protected characteristic groups known to face inequality, have increased participation and improved progression in learning and employment.

Our identified key measures for 2021-25 for this equality outcome are:

- Annual Participation Measure

- Apprenticeship starts

- Apprenticeship achievement rates

- Targeted S4–S6 pupils improving their career management skills

- Next Steps' customers improving their career management skills

- 'Next Steps' customers progressing to and sustaining in learning, training or employment.

Table 1.1: Annual Participation Measure[4]

Characteristic	Annual Participation Measure Rate (% people participating)				Overall change 2021-2024 (pp)	Variance from overall participation rate (pp)		
	2021	2022	2023	2024		2021	2024	Change 2021-2024
All aged 16-19	92.2	92.4	92.6	92.7	+0.5			
Gender								
Females	93.2	93.2	93.3	93.2	0	+1.0	+0.5	-0.6
Males	91.2	91.6	92.1	92.3	+1.1	-1.0	-0.4	+0.6
Ethnicity								
Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups	95.4	95.5	95.9	96.1	+0.7	+3.2	+3.3	+0.1
White[5]	92.0	92.2	92.5	92.5	+0.5	-0.2	-0.2	0
Disability								
Identified as disabled	88.3	88.7	88.8	89.1	+0.9	-3.9	-3.6	+0.3
Not identified as disabled	92.4	92.5	92.8	92.9	+0.6	+0.2	+0.2	0

The Annual Participation Measure reports the percentage of young adults (16 to 19 year-olds) participating in education, training or employment. As shown in table 1.1, between 2021 and 2024, participation increased across all groups, except females which remained the same (93.2%). The biggest improvement over the period was a 1.1 pp increase for males, yet this remains below that of females. The gap between the participation rate for people identified as disabled and the overall rate remains the greatest, although that gap has reduced sightly by 0.3 pp to 3.6%.

SDS is committed to treating Care Experience in the same way as others with protected characteristics. However, in the absence of reliable data, we are currently unable to include Care Experience in our analysis of the Annual Participation Measure.

4   The sum of numbers may not add up due to rounding
5   Note: The White ethnicity group includes young people from the following ethnicity categories:
     White – Scottish, White – Other British, White – Irish, White – Polish, Gypsy/Traveller and White – Other

Table 1.2 Career Management Skills[6] and Positive Destinations

Measure	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Targeted S4-S6 pupils improving their career management skills	81%	84%	87%	88%
'Next Steps' customers who were assessed improving their career management skills	68%	66%	66%	62%
'Next Steps' customers progressing to learning, training or employment and sustained it for at least six months	64%	68%	69%	73%

Our CIAG service offers an enhanced, targeted offer to young people who need the most support. Factors that can put young people in scope for the targeted offer includes, but is not limited to, whether they are an asylum seeker or refugee, Care Experienced, from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, have a health issue or are disabled, pregnant or from a 15% most deprived SIMD area. Among the targeted cohort, there was a 7 pp increase in S4-S6 pupils who improved their career management skills between 2020/21 and 2023/24.

Our 'Next Steps' programme is available to all unemployed young people seeking employment aged 15 to 18.5-years-old and has extended eligibility up to the age of 26 for individuals who are Care Experienced. The proportion of Next Steps customers who were assessed improving their career management skills has fallen by 6 pp since 2020/21, but there has been a 9 pp increase in customers progressing to learning, training or employment and sustaining it for six months.

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6   SDS use the term career management skills to mean "skills that empower individuals to identify the skills they have and the ones they need to develop, to help them realise their potential at any stage in their life".

Table 1.3: Modern Apprenticeship starts[7]

Customer Group	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Overall change (pp)
People who self-identified as being from a Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic group	2.7%	3.1%	3.3%	4.5%	+1.8
People who iself-identified as care experienced	1.7%	2.0%	2.1%	2.3%	+0.6
People who self-identified as disabled	13.0%	13.3%	15.3%	17.0%	+4.0

Table 1.4: Modern Apprenticeship achievement rate

Customer Group	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Overall change (pp)
People who self-identified as being from a Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic group	75.2%	71.6%	70.4%	73.4%	-1.8
People who self-identified as Care Experienced	66.3%	58.6%	59.9%	64.8%	-1.5
People who self-identified as disabled	69.9%	66.9%	67.0%	71.7%	+1.8
Overall Achievement Rate	76.4%	71.8%	72.7%	76.0%	-0.4

Modern apprenticeship starts have increased for each of the equality customer groups over the period. Those with a disability saw the biggest increase of 4.0 pp between 2020/21 and 2023/24 to 17.0%. In 2023/24, the proportion of starts self-identifying as Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or black; and Other ethnic group was 4.5%, the highest ever reported and 1.8 pp higher than 2020/21. Care Experienced Modern Apprenticeship starts increased by 0.6 pp to 2.3%.

The achievement rate for disabled Modern Apprenticeships increased by 1.8 pp since 2020/21 to 71.7% in 2023/24. While achievement rates are down for Mixed or Multiple; Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic group and Care Experienced Modern Apprentices compared with 2020/21, they have been steadily increasing since 2021/22. For more information on our work to tackle the persistent achievement rate gap for Care Experienced Modern Apprentices see section 4a.

7 The most recent FA Annual Report was published in 2022. This included data for the FA cohort who started in 2021/22.

Orkney Local Employability Hub

The Hub for Learning, Skills and Work officially opened its doors in Kirkwall, Orkney in 2023. Jointly designed and funded by SDS and Orkney Islands Council, the new partnership space provides a key base to support people on their employment journey.

The Local Employability Partnership (LEP) wanted to create an area where everyone of all ages and abilities feels welcome and can access any of the services provided by the range of employability partners working within the Orkney community. There are set sessions provided for key groups, such as CV workshops, as well as drop-in sessions which are open to all.

A group of young people who volunteered to form a service user group played a significant role in the development and even the naming of The Hub – a great example of the customer being at the heart of what we do.

All the participants agree that they have grown in confidence as a result of the experience and describe The Hub as "unique, empowering, optimistic, and a safe place." All plan to use and hope to benefit from the facility in their employment journey.

Amanda Spence, Team Leader at SDS, said: "The Orkney Hub is an inclusive and safe space for our customers to access support from SDS and a wide range of partners. Here, people can build their skills, confidence and networks to enable them to move on into their next steps."

Jack Woods, from Orphir, received support from SDS and the Orkney Employability Partnership. He cut the ribbon when the Hub opened in February 2023.

The Hub is available to all members of the LEP including the SDS Orkney team, the Council's Community Learning, Development and Employability team, Developing the Young Workforce, Employability Orkney, Orkney Health and Care, Jobcentre Plus, and the Voluntary Action Orkney Connect Project.

This outcome has aimed to address the impact of intersectionality on labour market and educational outcomes and acknowledge the negative impact that poverty in particular can have when combined with other characteristics. The **2025 Equality Evidence Review** found that the extent to which poverty underpins much of the inequality observed across the skills system is increasing. In delivering this outcome we have worked closely with many partners.

We have delivered the following actions identified in our 2021-25 report against Outcome One, in addition to the activity detailed in our **2023 report**.

1a. Review the CIAG Needs Matrix to determine additional factors that may lead to the need for targeted CIAG support.

SDS is developing and piloting potential ways to respond to the 10 Career Review recommendations. We have developed a proposition which directly responds to each, for example around developing experiential career learning opportunities and a digital skills profile offer. You can find out more about SDS's approach to experiential career learning **here**. We are doing this through co-design[8] with young people in four schools that were chosen to access a diverse population, including a range of geographies, SIMD areas, attainment and protected characteristics. In addition, we engage with equalities organisations to discuss our service proposition and consider potential barriers and challenges. Our Focal Point Groups were consulted on proposals for our Career Service, as part of the consultation for this Mainstreaming Report.

1b. Use further data analysis to identify key groups, with consideration of intersectionality, and monitor and evaluate progress.

SDS is committed to ensuring that individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds can access Modern Apprenticeships and achieve equitable outcomes. We encourage employers to value and develop a diverse talent pool with the right skills for their business. We recognise that it is often the interaction of different protected equality characteristics that creates the greatest inequalities.

As a result, we introduced intersectional data to the 2022/23 **Modern Apprenticeship statistics**, which are published every quarter, along with analysis of the intersectional data in the year-end Modern Apprenticeship report. Intersectional reporting provides valuable insight on the achievements of apprentices from a variety of backgrounds. Where the reporting of statistics is limited by disclosure control, we aim to provide commentary to give an indication of what the data is telling us.

We carry out extensive research with our customers, all of which can be broken down by protected characteristics and Care Experience where sample sizes allow:

- The **Pupils' Voice Survey** is used to gather feedback from almost 11,000 school pupils in S4 to S6 on the career services we deliver in their schools.

- The **Young People's Career Ambitions Survey** aims to understand the choices, influences, and motivations of young people in making career decisions.

- We collect feedback from apprentices on their experiences and satisfaction both during and after their training through **Apprentice Voice**.

We share the findings of this research, including analysis on protected groups and Care Experience.

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8 **Co-design** is a design approach that actively involves users and stakeholders from the beginning of a project, right through to roll-out.

1c. Increase awareness of the wide range of pathways into learning and employment amongst these groups and provide support to access them, including piloting new pathways into apprenticeships

SDS published our fourth [Corporate Parenting plan](#) in October 2024, setting out our new commitments for 2024-27. Since becoming a Corporate Parent in 2014, we have worked to improve the equality of opportunity and outcomes for all of Scotland's Care Experienced young people. In 2024 we also signed a joint working agreement with MCR Pathways aimed at improving the outcomes for young people in Scotland facing disadvantage in school and when transitioning from school into new pathways.

SDS worked in collaboration with DFN Project SEARCH, who support individuals with learning disabilities and/or autistic spectrum conditions into secure and sustainable employment. The partnership aimed to develop a more integrated pipeline approach and has created a methodology guide to support more individuals with complex disabilities into apprenticeships. Since our last mainstreaming report, we helped **sport**scotland to adapt the methodology to support disabled young people, including those with learning disabilities and/or autism, into Modern Apprenticeships and improve inclusion and diversity of people working in the sporting sector. **sport**scotland has since developed partnerships and a Modern Apprenticeship programme to support more disabled young people into employment in sport within Scottish governing bodies and local authorities.

In response to the underrepresentation of disabled people in the labour market, we have established a working group with CIAG colleagues to develop an approach to supporting ASN customers and ensure they access the best support. We work closely with partners, such as the Renfrewshire Health & Social Care Partnership autism pilot to support customers with learning and physical

disabilities during transitions. SDS colleagues have delivered group and 1-2-1 sessions to customers at the Better Lives Partnership in Dumfries and Galloway, a charity that supports autistic young adults and those with additional support needs. We then held follow-up meetings to ensure the young people had secured a positive destination.

1d. Map customer journeys for individuals in these customer groups, through the effective use of data and evidence, identifying and addressing barriers and enablers including interdependencies across the education and skills system

Our Delivering Customer Excellence programme aims to ensure we deliver a consistent high-quality service to all customers, first time and every time. As part of the programme, we are currently working on a project to map customer journeys in CIAG across broad general education, senior phase and post-school (up to the age of 20). This will allow us to better understand the current customer journeys for, and barriers to engagement/participation faced by, customers with protected characteristics. We will use these findings to inform improvements to SDS career services.

1e. Focus on upskilling and reskilling as a means to addressing in-work poverty

SDS funded a series of digital skills funds to upskill the current workforce and improve diversity. These include:

■ Digital Skills Pipeline provided funded courses for adults aged 25 years and over on low incomes to reskill/upskill in digital technology. Learners with basic digital tech skills were able to enter the talent pipeline and progress to further or higher education. Participants built the skills required to progress into careers in growth areas such as cyber security, software development and data analytics.

- The Digital Start Fund supported those who were unemployed or on low incomes to move back into the workforce, or from existing jobs into higher value tech jobs. The entry level course covered software, cyber and data learning.

SDS partnered with Glasgow City Council to support the delivery of the Digital Young Person's Guarantee. Young people participating in the Glasgow Code Learning programme attended awareness sessions on careers, apprenticeships, industry and entrepreneurship to support their progression. These were delivered by SDS, employers, Young Enterprise and learning providers.

Colleagues work with One Community Scotland, a youth organisation that supports young people from minority ethnic communities as they settle in Scotland. We have provided work experience to ethnic minority young people looking to gain experience in user experience, insight, and coding.

1f. Identify any skills gaps and build capability of colleagues across services through a programme of needs assessed, equality focused CPD

There is a high level of awareness of the importance of equality and diversity SDS. In 2024, 88% of colleagues responding to our staff survey said they understood the importance of equality to their own role.

We have continued to provide a range of equality CPD for colleagues. Mandatory equality e-learning for all colleagues includes:

- Corporate Parenting, which was updated in 2024 in partnership with Who Cares? Scotland

- managing diversity

- improving understanding of children's rights, which was introduced in 2025.

In addition, there is a managing equality and diversity workshop or people managers and we have continued to offer 'It's about Race' training sessions, delivered by the Diversity Trust.

Our SDS Equality Evidence Hub, launched in 2022, brings internal and external equality data, statistics, reports and other information together in one place for use by colleagues. Alongside our externally published **Equality Evidence Review**, we publish focussed papers on equality groups on our intranet. Information is broken down by protected characteristic group, along with Care Experience and poverty.

We also launched revised intranet pages with the key things colleagues may need to know when supporting customers or colleagues in 2024, with support from our employee networks and Focal Point Groups. This covers definitions, context, good practice, signposting for customers and further learning, and is broken down by different equality groups.

In support of the Scottish Government's Fair Work Action Plan, we have continued to implement the Principles of Good Transitions across our CIAG through targeted CPD for all customer-facing colleagues and managers. The recommendations made by a short life working group on transitions for disabled people are being taken forward through our Transform 27 programme.

Our Digital and Physical Accessibility Guidance was produced in 2024 to ensure equality and accessibility across our services. The overarching principle is to be proactive in our approach to accessibility. To do this we must ensure the places in which we work are physically accessible and that our communications are as accessible as possible.

Equality Outcome 2: Women and girls can access and sustain learning and careers which reflect their skills and interests, enabled by the adoption of gender-sensitive approaches from employers and key influencers.

Our identified 2021-25 key measures for this equality outcome are:

- percentage of senior phase pupils self-identified as female agreeing their Careers Adviser:

  - 'challenged me to explore a wide range of career options' – 'encouraged me to aim high for my future career'

  - 'supported me to make my own decisions and take control of my career path'

- Average effectiveness rating given by senior phase pupils self-identified as female to SDS career services in helping them to:

  - 'Think about all of the learning, work and career options open to you'

  - 'Challenge stereotypes, such as ideas of "traditional" male or female jobs'

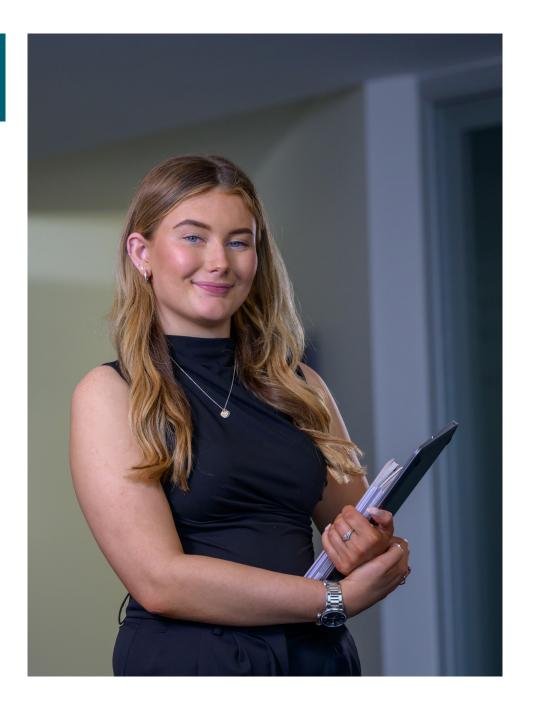- Gender balance in apprenticeship starts and achievement rates

Table 2.1: Feedback from senior phase pupils

Female senior phase pupils agreeing their Careers Adviser:	2021	2023[9]	2024
Encouraged me to explore a wide range of career options[10]	7.0	7.4	7.4
Encouraged me to aim high for my future career	7.5	7.9	7.9
Supported me to make my own decisions and take control of my career path	7.7	8.1	8.1
Average effectiveness rating given by female senior phase pupils to SDS career services in helping them to (score out of 10):	**2021**	**2023**	**2024**
Think about all of the learning, work and career options open to you	6.2	6.7	NA[11]
Challenge stereotypes, such as ideas of "traditional" male or female jobs	6.1	6.5	NA[12]

The mean point score (rated from 1 disagree to 10 agree) is calculated by adding all the scores together and dividing by the number of respondents.

There has been a positive increase in feedback received from female senior phase pupils in the Pupils' Voice survey. Responses from female pupils on being encouraged to explore a wide range of career options and aim high in their future career, and being supported to make their own decisions and take control of my career path all had a 0.4 score improvement. Responses from female pupils on whether they thought career advisers had helped to think about all of the learning, work and career options and challenge stereotypes also saw improvement, but these questions were removed from the survey in 2024.

9 The Pupils' Voice Survey was previously biennial and so did not take place in 2022. It is now an annual survey.

10 This question was previously worded "Challenged me to explore a wide range of career options" as outlined in our Equality and Diversity Report 2021-25. It was changed to "Encouraged me to explore a wide range of career options" in the 2021 survey.

11 This question was removed from the survey in 2024.

12 This question was removed from the survey in 2024.

Table 2.2: Gender balance in Modern Apprenticeship starts

Modern Apprenticeships Starts	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Female	40.0%	38.6%	37.8%	37.6
Male	60.0%	60.8%	61.5%	62.4%

Table 2.3: Gender balance in Modern Apprenticeship achievement rates

Modern Apprenticeships Achievement Rate	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Female	76.2%	71.6%	74.1%	78.3%
Male	76.6%	71.9%	71.8%	74.7%

Female starts made up 37.6% of Modern Apprenticeship starts in 2023/24, 2.4 pp lower than 2020/21. The widening of the gender gap may be partly explained by the increase in starts to male dominated occupational groupings like Automotive and Engineering.

The female achievement rate reached 78.3% in 2023/24, up by 2.1 pp since 2020/21. It is higher than the male achievement rate of 74.7%, which has decreased by 1.9 pp since 2020/21.

Career advice led to a dream career in engineering

Teen Charly Simpson thought her future was floundering until help from her school careers adviser led to a dream career in engineering.

When Charly started S4 at Bertha Park High school in Perth she was finding it difficult to study. A talk from the school's careers adviser, Maxine Scott, gave her the motivation to get help.

"Coming back into school after Covid, I was still getting used to learning. I wasn't really looking into the future at this point.

"Maxine joined a school assembly meeting to speak to my year about the help she can give pupils and I spoke to her after that."

Maxine explained: "We spent a lot of time together working out what Charly wanted to do in the future. I could see that she took inspiration from her dad, who worked in forestry, and she also loved to help him fix and refurbish old cars.

Maxine suggested that Charly investigate apprenticeships as an option, which offer the chance to get into a job that provides hands on experience whilst working up to a qualification.

Charly started looking into them with Maxine and found out about an apprenticeship opportunity at SSE Renewables at a career fair. When Charly made it through to the rigorous interview process, Maxine was there to support her every step of the way with coaching and support through each of the five stages.

Charly's determination paid off and she started a Mechanical and Electrical Engineering Modern Apprenticeship in August 2023, which takes up to four years to complete.

Maxine said: "Charly is an inspiring young person who was open to explore the opportunities and along the way, with her careers coaching, she built up her confidence which enabled her to find a career she didn't know existed."

Charly ended: "I didn't expect the kind of help I got from Maxine but she was amazing. I wouldn't be here in my dream job if it wasn't for Maxine. She made me get out of my shell and look forward to the rest of my life."

When this outcome was set in 2021, we were in the process of finalising the **Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board's (SAAB) Gender Commission**. Much of our activity in the following period supporting women and girls has been focussed on the work of the SAAB Gender Commission and delivering its recommendations. As a result, SDS has taken a structured approach to working with our partners from public sector and private employers to deliver wider system change.

Progress in tackling labour market segregation, for example through the uptake of females in Modern Apprenticeships, remains stubborn, in contrast to other protected characteristics (as discussed under Outcome 1). We have continued our commitment to tackling occupational segregation in our new equality outcomes and will use our influence and relationships to drive positive system change.

We have delivered the following actions identified in our 2021-25 report against Outcome Two, in addition to the activity detailed in our **2023 report**.

2a. Use further data analysis to identify key groups from intersectional data and monitor and evaluate progress

In recognition of the complex intersections of inequalities faced by minority ethnic women in the labour market, a Women and Girls short life working group was established to support the Commission on Race in Apprenticeships. The group aimed to identify gaps in the Commission's existing evidence of barriers faced by minority ethnic women and girls within the workplace and apprenticeships. It asked what employers can do to improve representation by minority ethnic women in the labour market. One of the findings was that further promotion of apprenticeship opportunities is needed. A recommendation for education is

to undertake targeted promotion to specific groups such as women and girls and refugees by having role models and targeted promotional materials.

We are trialling enhancements to our internal reporting to allow us to better interrogate intersectional data. As a result, we can compare how multiple factors come together to impact customers' outcomes over time. This data has been used to inform the completion of IEIAs and in the development of this Equality and Diversity Mainstreaming Report, for example.

In partnership with the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS), SDS run the collaborative PhD programme. Our PhD researchers examine key questions in skills policy, skills delivery, and career information, advice and guidance. Several of our PhD researchers are working on topics with an equality and diversity focus. For example, we are currently funding an SDS PhD topic to look at gendered information landscapes and their impact on apprenticeships, examining how different sources of gender stereotyping impact on young people's career choices. The collaborative PhD Programme demonstrates investment by SDS in creating new equality insights and aims to bring new thinking to skills policy and delivery in Scotland.

2b. Consider and implement recommendations from the SAAB Gender Commission for SDS and its partners

SDS facilitated the employer-led SAAB Gender Commission which aimed to change long-term societal and workplace attitudes around gender in apprenticeships. The Commission looked at the challenges of gender inequality in the workplace and, crucially, what can be done collectively to address them to ensure fairer and more equal economic opportunities.

The Commission was made up of representatives from key business sectors, trade bodies, public sector employers, educators and academics. The report was published in 2022 following two and a half years gathering data, consulting experts and engaging employers. Twelve recommendations were made for employers, government, public sector bodies, education and learning providers and SAAB itself. These offered practical changes to deliver tangible benefits for business, individuals and society, both in the immediate future and the longer term. The implementation phase is now underway.

One of the outputs of the commission is the use of Close the Gap's 'think business think equality' tool. The existing tool is designed for small and medium businesses and third sector organisations who want to find out how their business can benefit from improved gender equality.

2c. Learn from sectors where progress has been made, like digital/ technology and apply learning to growth sectors

SDS published the [Digital Economy Skills Action Plan](#) (DESAP) in 2023. We commissioned an equalities baseline report to support the implementation of the DESAP. This illustrates the current levels of diversity within education, training routes and the workforce in technology related qualifications and occupations.

2d. Support young women and girls, and their influencers, to pursue opportunities and pathways in male-dominated / "traditional" industries, should this be their choice

We are working in partnership with system stakeholders to expand experiential career learning into the curriculum. We are co-designing this alongside young people, employers and teachers. Our future aspiration is for a range of experiential career learning opportunities that could enable young people to expand their horizons and potentially challenge areas of gender-based occupational segregation.

An experiential learning opportunity was developed for pupils S3-S6 that challenges stereotypical career choices. The 'Try Something Different – Be a Modern Apprentice for the day' project gives pupils an opportunity to spend a day with a local employer as a Modern Apprentice and learn about careers in heavily gender-segregated industries. SDS has delivered the project in partnership with the University of the Highlands and Islands, Shetland Council and Developing the Young Workforce. We are now expanding the project.

SDS administered and procured the Scottish Government funded Women Returners Programme which supported women returners across Scotland who have had a career break of six months or more or have multiple barriers to employment. The programme aimed to help reduce the gender pay gap, improve women's economic position in the labour market and deliver fair and inclusive economic growth. The Scottish Government ended funding for this project at the end of 2022.

SDS procured Women into STEM pathway projects to tackle the gender imbalance that exists in STEM careers. Three organisations (West College Scotland, Edinburgh Napier and University of the Highlands and Islands) in different geographic areas were selected to develop sustainable local pipelines to recruit, prepare and progress women aged 16-24 into STEM careers. This included progression into Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. The projects undertook work to review recruitment approaches to be more inclusive of women, engage STEM tech employers to create more inclusive and female-friendly workplaces and deliver workshops to change young women's perceptions of STEM

careers. Aligned with the recommendations of the SAAB Gender Commission, work is required across public services in education and skills to make a sustainable impact on the gender imbalance that persists in STEM careers. SDS will continue to prioritise our efforts to drive positive system change in relation to labour market segregation.

2e. Work with partners to develop guidance for employers to support them to have inclusive workplaces and address occupational segregation based on gender (and race)

A diverse workforce leads to higher productivity, creativity and profitability. A new inclusive recruitment guide is available on the **SDS Employer Hub** to support employers understand and adopt inclusive recruitment practices. The guide offers tips on how to widen a search for candidates and making a recruitment process fair, with ideas that are practical and often free or low-cost.

We worked with Women and Girls Focal Point Group members, Equate and Close the Gap to identify key training and support for learning providers. Suggestions on the types of training and support that would be beneficial for learning providers were made by the group and priority areas agreed. As a result, Equate Scotland ran training for work-based learning providers on 'creating inclusive workspaces' with 79 attendees and Close the Gap ran training on 'equally safe at work: tackling sexual harassment' with 31 attendees. The programmes were designed to be practical and focus on the real-world challenges faced by learning providers. Learning providers have reported increased confidence and competence in supporting women and girls.

2f. Identify any skills gaps and build capability of colleagues across services, including relevant gender equality training

Following the SAAB Gender Commission recommendations, we have developed a CPD module for SDS colleagues, including Careers Advisers, on the Gender Commission, including the impact of occupational segregation. We established a user test group with Developing the Young Workforce and NHS Education for Scotland to beta test the training module and received constructive feedback. The CPD module has been rolled out for SDS staff and will soon be made available externally. We are taking forward our commitment around labour market segregation in our Equality Outcomes for 2025-29.

> **Equality Outcome 3: Lived experience of people from protected characteristic groups is a fundamental component of the design and development of SDS services, improving their customer experience and outcomes**

Our identified key measures for this equality outcome in 2021-25 include:

- Percentage of customers with protected characteristics who are satisfied with SDS services.

- Percentage of customers with protected characteristics who would recommend SDS services to others [outcomes for these customer groups will be monitored through Outcome 1].

Table 3.1: Senior phase pupils (targeted) feedback

Senior phase targeted pupils		Satisfied with SDS services	Likelihood to recommend SDS services to others
		2023/24	2023/24
		Mean point score	Mean point score
All aged 16+ S4-S6 targeted pupils		9.1	8.8
Gender	Female	9.2	9.0
	Male	9.1	8.7
Race	Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups	9.1	9.2
	White	9.1	8.8
Additional Support Needs (ASN)	ASN	9.0	8.7
	Non-ASN	9.2	8.9
Care Experience	Identified as Care Experienced	9.1	8.8
	Not identified as Care Experienced	9.1	8.8

Table 3.2: Senior phase pupils (not targeted) feedback

Senior phase pupils (not targeted)		Satisfied with SDS services	Likelihood to recommend SDS services to others
		2023/24	2023/24
		Mean point score	Mean point score
All aged 16+ S4-S6 pupils (not targeted for SDS support)		9.3	9.1
Gender	Female	9.3	9.2
	Male	9.3	9.0
Race	Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups	9.4	9.2
	White	9.3	9.1
Additional Support Needs (ASN)	ASN	9.1	9.0
	Non-ASN	9.3	9.1
Care Experience	Identified as Care Experienced	9.1	8.6
	Not identified as Care Experienced	9.3	9.1

Table 3.3: Adult universal customers feedback

Adult universal customers Services available to all adults, regardless of age or circumstance		Satisfied with SDS services	Likelihood to recommend SDS services to others
		2023/24	2023/24
		Mean point score	Mean point score
	All universal customers	9.6	9.5
Gender	Female	9.6	9.7
	Male	9.6	9.5
Race	Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups	9.6	9.9
	White	9.6	9.5
Additional Support Needs (ASN)	ASN	9.5	9.3
	Non-ASN	9.7	9.7
Care Experience	Identified as Care Experienced	9.8	9.8
	Not identified as Care Experienced	9.6	9.5

Table 3.4: Next Steps customers feedback

Next Steps customers Young people aged 16-18.5 years (or 16-25 with Care Experience) who are unemployed and seeking work		Satisfied with SDS services	Likelihood to recommend SDS services to others
		2023/24	2023/24
		Mean point score	Mean point score
All Next Steps		9.5	9.4
Gender	Female	9.7	9.6
	Male	9.4	9.3
Race	Asian; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups	9.6	9.0
	White	9.5	9.5
Additional Support Needs (ASN)	ASN	9.4	9.4
	Non-ASN	9.6	9.5
Care Experience	Identified as Care Experienced	9.8	9.5
	Not identified as Care Experienced	9.5	9.5

Partnership working with Focal Point Groups

We are grateful to our Focal Point Group members for their support and proactive engagement.

Focal Point Group	Established	Total number of meetings	No. of members we engage with (at April 2025)
Care Experienced	December 2020	13	10
Disability	December 2020	13	22
Women and Girls	March 2023	6	8
Race/Ethnic Minority	November 2023	6	14

Below are some examples of consultation and involvement which have happened at the Focal Point Groups, or as a direct result of our partnerships with members of the Focal Point Groups.

Digital user testing

SDS has used the relationships developed with the Disability Focal Point Group members to extend the reach of digital user-testing, reaching over 1,000 people.

The feedback from this testing has been used to improve SDS digital service offer to disabled people. This includes changes to make our digital services content more meaningful and ensure the design and functionality are inclusive and accessible.

SDS has recently introduced an online translation service. The accuracy and usability of these translations have been tested by members of the Race Focal Point Group.

CPD for learning providers

We worked with Focal Point Groups members, Equate and Close the Gap to identify key training and support for learning providers.

Feedback from the Women and Girls Focal Point Group highlighted the need for targeted training and development to better support women and girls.

As a result, Equate Scotland ran training for work-based learning providers on 'creating inclusive workspaces' with 79 attendees and Close the Gap ran training on 'equally safe at work: tackling sexual harassment' with 31 attendees.

Consultation on Enhanced Funding

Working with the Scottish Government, SDS led a consultation on a review of the Enhanced Funding Contribution. The consultation aimed to ensure that Modern Apprenticeship funding mechanisms are fair and effective in meeting the needs of disabled and Care Experienced people.

Eight specialist organisations were involved, including members of the disability and Care Experience Focal Point Groups. This ensured that lived experience of customers was heard and considered in the decision-making process.

This outcome is integral to our overall approach to achieving all our equality outcomes. The use of co-design has supported the delivery of our other four outcomes and is a core part of how we improve service design and delivery. By understanding the experiences people have through their individual lives we aim to ensure the products and services we design, deliver and improve fit their needs and improve their experiences and outcomes. Consultation with colleagues suggested that the use of lived experience has been successfully embedded in SDS. Feedback suggested colleagues' awareness of the purpose and benefits that using lived experience in the design and development of services has improved over the timeframe of the plan. This has been formalised through IEIAs and Focal Point Groups which were established over the period of this report.

We have delivered the following actions identified in our 2021-25 report against Outcome Three, in addition to the activity detailed in our **2023 report**.

3a. Embed lived experience in co-design and co-production in our programmes from start to finish - to include diverse representation, where possible, on project teams across SD&D including the Career Review, to ensure the inclusion of diverse, lived-experience

The Scottish Government commissioned an independent review of Scotland's career services as part of the Young Person's Guarantee. The Career Review adopted a co-design approach from the outset and made the user voice central to the way in which the Review was conducted and its recommendations developed. SDS and partners worked with more than 80 young people under 18, who came from a diverse range of backgrounds and were engaged in the review through interviews, group discussions and workshops. Published in February 2022, each of the ten **Career Review recommendations** is supported by a clear equality impact statement.

We have continued to develop our approach to stakeholder engagement, and this includes our Focal Point Groups with third sector organisations. Since our last report, we have established a Lived Experience community of practice of all protected characteristic groups and Care Experienced people. The aim of the group is to develop a deeper understanding of the lived experience of protected groups and how to use this evidence to improve SDS products and services. The group brings together internal practitioners who gather customer insight and ensure we have a consistent approach. As a result, this group created resources for staff on supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities (see section 3e).

3b. Collect and utilise intersectional data and robust evaluation to inform our programmes and services

The equality data collection working group has been the primary group for the development of organisational good practice regarding Equality data collection, promoting consistency in practice across the business. The working group supports the delivery of the equality outcomes, focusing on data collection and measurements, with a specific action around improving the reporting of intersectional data. It is also responsive to business needs, working as a consultative group for specific actions and projects that require advice and support around equality data. Introducing the intersectional reporting in the Modern Apprenticeship statistics (discussed under section 1b) was a recommendation from the data collection working group.

3c. Take a systematic approach to user-testing with equality groups to ensure access and continually improve the universal digital service offer for customers with protected characteristics

SDS launched a new version of Scotland's career information and advice website **My World of Work** in 2024. The website can be used to explore how careers match which skills, personality and strengths and introduce a range of associated jobs. Information is tailored to individuals of all ages, educators and parents and carers. One of the ambitions of the project is that every learner in Scotland, from age 3 to 18 and beyond, is supported by a national digital approach to profiling learning and recognising achievement. A national co-design group, which is made up of members from a wide variety of organisations, has been working with learners in schools, colleges and youth settings. Over 70 young people were engaged in co-design and insight on how to support young people to identify, reflect on and articulate their skills. This covered primary, secondary and college students including those with additional support needs and those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

Our work with the Disability Focal Point Group has improved our understanding of the challenges and barriers disabled customers face. We have worked with many specialist disability organisations to identify and engage with disabled people as part of our user-testing for our digital services. The feedback from this user-testing has been used to improve the content, design and functionality of our digital services, and ensure they are inclusive and accessible.

SDS has recently introduced an online translation service. The accuracy and usability of these translations have been tested by some members of the Race Focal Point Group.

3d. Further develop and adopt good practice in relation to equality impact assessment

Since our last report, we have introduced a new integrated (IEIA) process that brings together Equality Impact Assessments, Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments and Islands Communities Impact Assessments. It is designed to simplify the process and provide thorough, systematic assessment of the effects of introducing a new, or adjusting an existing policy, project or service. Colleagues are asked if there are experts or people affected by the project that should be consulted to ensure lived experience is embedded. The Equality Evidence Hub (discussed in 1f) brings together resources that colleagues can draw upon for completing an IEIA. There has been an increase in the number of assessments being completed since the new process was launched. Examples of IEIAs completed include the Results Helpline, My World of Work, **apprenticeships.scot** website, Work-based Learning, Foundation Apprenticeships in STEM, Employer Hub, Digital Economy Skills Action Plan and the migration to local employability hubs.

The Business Support Partnership (BSP) Equality Group (for more information see 4d) developed a new training module on completing Equality Impact Assessments. More than 80 colleagues from across the partnership attended the launch of the module that shares learning and good practice. The module uses real-life examples of colleagues completing equality impact assessments and the benefits this has brought to their projects and customers. The module sits alongside other IEIA training for colleagues.

3e. Identify any skills gaps and build capability of colleagues across services through a programme of needs assessed, equality focused CPD

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are some of the most disadvantaged ethnic groups in Scotland and the UK. In recognition of this, our Lived Experience community of practice developed resources to support staff to increase their knowledge and understanding of the communities and consider how SDS can best deliver our services to them (see section 3a). We consulted with third sector organisations with experience of working with the communities as well as some individuals who were willing to share their lived experience and advice for offering career guidance.

SDS held our internal Diversity in Action Week in 2023 to build the knowledge and confidence of colleagues around various equality, diversity and inclusion topics. The sessions covered a range of topics, focussing on continuous improvement in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion within our services but also as an employer and colleague-to-colleague. For example, a video highlighted the impact of social privilege. Sessions were delivered in a range of formats and were recorded so that colleagues who were unable to attend could watch at another time.

Equality Outcome 4: Businesses are aware of the benefits of diversity and fair work practices and increasingly adopt and embed them, improving the well-being of people from protected characteristic groups.

Our identified key measures for this equality outcome in 2021-25 include:

- Percentage of regulated contracts awarded during the period that have included a scored Fair Work criterion.

- Percentage of unique suppliers who have committed to pay the real Living Wage in the delivery of a regulated contract awarded during the period.

- Percentage of unique suppliers who are accredited Living Wage employers and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period.

- Percentage of unique suppliers who have signed up to the Scottish Business Pledge and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period.

Table 4.1: Fair Work supplier measures

Measure	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Percentage of regulated contracts awarded during the period that have included a scored Fair Work criterion	11.5%	50%	23.8%
Percentage of unique suppliers who are accredited Living Wage employers and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period	50.9%	57.0%	55.0%
Percentage of unique suppliers who have signed up to the Scottish Business Pledge and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period.	37.9%	42.6%	NA

The percentage of regulated contracts awarded during the period that have included a scored Fair Work criterion has fluctuated over time. The percentage of unique suppliers who are accredited Living Wage employers and were awarded a regulated contract awarded during the period increased between 2021/22 and 2023/24. The Scottish Government announced it was no longer continuing the Scottish Business Pledge in 2023 and so it has not been included for 2023/24. We were unable to collect data on unique suppliers who committed to paying the real Living Wage in the delivery of a regulated contract.

Commission on Race in Apprenticeships

The Commission on Race in Apprenticeships by SDS in partnership with the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) set out 20 recommendations to improve ethnic minority participation in Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships. These recommendations form an action plan for employers, Scottish Government, education, and public agencies.

Sharon Blyfield OBE, Head of Early Careers and Apprenticeships at Coca-Cola Europacific Partnerships and Race Commission Chair said: "This Commission came together to accelerate change to address racial imbalance in apprenticeships and provide leadership and guidance to employers, educators and policy makers.

"Addressing the under-representation of people from minority ethnic backgrounds in apprenticeships is crucial for promoting equality and inclusion and providing those individuals with access to career opportunities and skills development.

"It is not only a matter of social justice and equality though, it also makes economic and practical sense as it enriches the workforce, helps close skills gaps, and fosters more inclusive and creative businesses."

Short-life working groups were established to enable Commission members to investigate key themes in greater depth, including one on women and girls.

The Women and Girls short-life working group aimed to address the complex intersections of inequalities faced by minority ethnic women in the labour market and apprenticeships.

Key suggestions from the short-life working group include more targeted promotion to women and girls, including the use of diverse role models, providing cultural awareness training for staff and the use of student champions or mentors. In addition, a recommendation for employers is to adopt safe working practices and limit out of hours activities for apprentices that may act as a barrier to women and girls, particularly those operating in male-dominated industries.

SDS has worked with businesses to encourage them to adopt and embed fair work. We have developed a range of resources and equality training for learning providers to ensure that employers are aware of fair work and the advantages it brings for their business and employees. Our approach in this area has been through the SAAB Commissions on race and gender, along with the report from the SAAB short-life working group on Care Experience.

We have delivered the following actions identified in our 2021-25 report against Outcome Four, in addition to the activity detailed in our **2023 report**.

4a. Elevate lived experience of people from protected characteristic groups to contribute to more diverse and inclusive practice by using our convening power and commission-based approaches

SDS has led the development of, facilitated and contributed to several SAAB commissions and reports.

The **Commission on Race in Apprenticeships** found that barriers faced by minority ethnic individuals in accessing apprenticeships include cultural expectations, lack of awareness, and misconceptions about apprenticeships as lower-status opportunities. The Commission was chaired by Sharon Blyfield OBE, Head of Early Careers & Apprenticeships GB, Coca Cola Euro-Pacific Partners, and membership included representation from finance, IT, education, higher education, accountancy, hairdressing, construction, public sector and the Chamber of Commerce. The report findings support growing evidence there is a strong business case for improving racial and ethnic diversity in apprenticeships, with diverse organisations tending to outperform less diverse ones and benefit from increased revenues and customer satisfaction. Successful initiatives such as targeted recruitment, mentoring, and the use of diverse role models, have shown promise in improving

minority ethnic participation in apprenticeships. The Commission makes a series of recommendations for employers, the Scottish Government, Scottish Government agencies and education.

The report on making **apprenticeships more accessible and attractive to Care Experienced young people**, identified good practice that employers, SAAB, local authorities and SDS can put in place to better support Care Experienced young people. One of the key recommendations for SDS was to ensure mentoring support is available for all Care Experienced apprentices. We are implementing this with our strategic partner, MCR Pathways. In addition, training has been delivered to learning providers to build their capacity and better understand how to support Care Experienced apprentices, including mentoring delivered by Barnardo's Scotland and Who Cares? Scotland.

For information on the SAAB Gender Commission see section 2b.

4b. Become an active member of an EDI coalition and consider a memorandum of understanding with another organisation and/or focused coalition to achieve this outcome

SDS is a member of the Business Support Partnership, along with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, South of Scotland Enterprise, Business Gateway, Scotland's local authorities, and sector specific agencies Creative Scotland and VisitScotland. SDS chairs the Equality Group that shares learning to improve equality knowledge and practice across the partners. An equality event was held in partnership with the other Business Support Partnership members in 2023. Key inputs from SDS covered the consultation to inform the development of new digital technology pages on My World of Work, the benefits of co-location at the Orkney Hub and the SAAB Gender Commission recommendations.

4c. Building on the Apprenticeship Equality Action Plan, set clear expectations on equality and fair work for suppliers and support in achieving those

Learning providers are contracted by SDS to deliver work-based learning. Through our commissioning and contract management processes we set expectations that learning providers will take proactive steps to support us in achieving our aim of ensuring equality of opportunity.

We provide training and resources to inform and upskill learning providers on the needs of different groups and practical steps they can take to recruit and support individuals from a diverse range of backgrounds. To promote equality and opportunity of access, we have delivered CPD sessions on needs assessment, mental health, autism awareness, race equality, suicide prevention, engaging with ethnically diverse communities, poverty awareness and supporting Care Experienced young people sessions. We delivered 24 different CPD opportunities to learning providers, with between 10 and 200 learning providers participating in each. We also commissioned specialist mental health organisation, Penumbra, to develop resources on mental health for employers and apprentices. In support of our commitments on the Fair Work Action Plan, disability related CPD for Learning Providers, was developed and delivered by the Scottish Union of Supported Employment (SUSE) in 2024/25, with a focus on needs assessment and reasonable adjustments. Furthermore, in partnership with the SFC, we have reviewed the equality incentives for disabled people in relation to work based learning and made recommendations regarding participation and achievement rates for disabled people.

4d. Highlight key strengths and areas for improvement, including effective practice and any case studies, through a formal quality thematic review of apprenticeships

SDS works to ensure underrepresented groups can participate and succeed in SDS commissioned apprenticeships. Apprentice Voice research is an innovative way to collect feedback and insight from apprenticeships across the system, broken down by protected group, in real time. Identifying case studies and real-life stories can be a powerful way to influence employers. Case studies are intended to support the promotion of SDS services and alternative pathways for individuals in their career, and to support aspirations of those from equality groups. Quality Assurance Reviews are completed annually with a specific section on equality groups to identify enhancements. Examples of effective practice flagged within the Initial Assessment thematic review report were showcased by three learning providers on a webinar to around 200 attendees.

4e. Resources developed for individuals on wellbeing, employment rights and responsibilities

We developed a section on fair working practices in apprenticeships for the **apprenticeships.scot** website in 2023/24, based on insight from apprentices on all work-based learning programmes and colleagues. The aim was to ensure current apprentices are better informed about their rights at work and the support they can expect to receive during their apprenticeship. The page signposts to information on redundancy, unions and the Fair Work framework, along with details on mental health support, money and funding and parental leave, including maternity, paternity, adoption and surrogacy. Information is also provided on support for apprentices who are disabled, Care Experienced or are carers.

4f. Support employers in relation to skills, knowledge and expertise to implement fair work practices

The Employer Equality Action Plan was developed to ensure equality and diversity are embedded throughout our employer service offer. We encourage businesses to adopt fair work to improve the outcomes and wellbeing of people from protected characteristic groups.

SDS has partnered with the Scottish Asian Business Chamber to provide tailored support and communication to businesses in minority ethnic groups. Employer visits have taken place to a range of minority ethnic owned businesses across industry, including retail, hospitality and healthcare, with more planned for the future. The partnership has allowed us to better understand common obstacles faced by minority ethnic business owners and consider how SDS can support. Apprenticeship information sessions have been held with young people, parents and carers from minority ethnic backgrounds, which have received positive feedback. These have highlighted Foundation, Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships opportunities across the huge variety of frameworks available.

SDS produce an evidence review which demonstrates the business case for diversity. The evidence review is used to inform the content for an equality toolkit for staff. The toolkit summarises the key points from a wide range of existing resources, bringing these together into one place makes it easier for employer teams to find, use and share with employers. We developed and published Inclusive Recruitment Guides on the Employer Hub providing information for employers on how to make their working practices more inclusive, including showcasing case studies of good practice from other employers (see section 2e).

We regularly run webinars for employers which have equality embedded throughout. In 2024 we hosted a webinar with an equality focus on the benefits of inclusive recruitment, featuring an employer who shared their experience.

The Skills Planning and Sector Development community of practice aims to share and develop good practice amongst colleagues from sectors or projects where progress is being made. The group facilitates the sharing of good practice in identifying, understanding and addressing diversity and inclusion challenges, and uses this information to inform skills planning activities across the team.

Inclusive recruitment at Glen Mhor

Victoria Erasmus, director and owner of the Glen Mhor Hotel in Inverness, Uile-Bheist Distillery and Brewery and Turas Hotels Group that owns hotels, bars and restaurants around Scotland, took up the Skills for Growth service from Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

The family-owned business has a strong focus on supporting people with additional support needs into employment and SDS helped with her vision.

Victoria was guided through the process by Michelle Denoon, Employer Engagement Executive at SDS. As part of the package of support, Michelle assessed the skills needs of the company and provided them with recommendations to develop its workforce.

Michelle shared SDS's inclusive recruitment guide containing links to various organizations to support equality and diversity efforts. SDS also provided resources and support for training existing staff on equality and diversity.

Michelle worked with Victoria to develop a recruitment process that is inclusive and supportive of people with additional support needs.

Victoria explained: "To make our business more inclusive we've changed our recruitment process. We have social stories for job interviews and another one for work experience. The questions are sent to the candidates in advance. They are offered a sit

down, a walk around and a movement interview and we also offer the "bring a buddy" system. We select places and they can choose where they want the interview to take place. This is standard practice; it is something that we have changed in our recruitment process."

Victoria's aim is to ensure that all businesses have a diverse workforce and are aware of the challenges people may face. In the hotel's reception they have sensory backpacks and noise cancelling headphones for guests and staff.

Victoria's approach to equality is seen as leading the way for employers, advocating for inclusive practices to be standard rather than additional.

Equality Outcome 5: SDS benefits from increased diversity throughout our workforce, particularly in relation to gender, race and disability, and colleagues with protected characteristics feel heard, respected and fulfilled at work.

Our identified key measures for this equality outcome in 2021-25 include:

- percentage of employees reporting information on each of the protected characteristics (contained in Appendix A)

- results from our employee engagement surveys

- monitoring of career progression and CPD hours by equality groups (contained in Appendix A)

- equal pay gap (Gender, Disability and Ethnicity) (contained in Appendix B)

- percentage of women, Minority Ethnic and disabled people in manager and leadership roles (contained in Appendix B)

- Stonewall Index Ranking

Table 5.1: Employee Engagement survey results

Your Views question	2019	2021	2024
% employees agree 'SDS is an Equal Opportunities Employer'	94%	95%	88%
% employees agree 'SDS welcomes and accommodates the different needs of all colleagues'	92%	93%	85%
% employees agree 'SDS demonstrates a culture of dignity and respect'	94%	96%	88%

Progress against all measures and actions must be considered in the context of external factors which have impacted significantly on SDS operating environment and our employees' working lives during the period of this mainstreaming report.

SDS are acutely aware of the financial constraints affecting the public sector. We have been proactive in our response and are committed to a new, sustainable operating model through our Transform 27 programme. This has included a significant reduction of 18% in our employee headcount since 2021, which has necessitated strict management of recruitment and career progression opportunities during this period. Further information is provided at Annex A.

The Scottish Government's post-school education and skills reform has created significant uncertainty on the future function and remit of SDS. There is the potential transfer of undertaking which may include employment obligations to alternative organisations, which understandably created significant uncertainty for the working lives of colleagues.

In that context, while SDS employee engagement and satisfaction continued to increase between 2019 and 2021, our 2024 scores show a decrease. The scores on equality-related questions detailed above are therefore consistent with a wider pattern. Despite this, all employee engagement survey themes and our mean point score remain positive suggesting we still maintain a positive employee experience overall at SDS.

Table 5.2: Stonewall Index Ranking

2022
29th out of 403 UK employers

SDS last submitted to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2022 and ranked 29th out of 403 UK employers.

Diversability Employee Network Group

The Diversability Group is for colleagues living with a disability or a long-term health condition, whether mental or physical, and those who are neurodivergent.

The group aims to provide an impactful, meaningful, collective employee voice, promoting inclusion across SDS.

Collectively, the group has influenced and consulted on projects including the uses of AI, internal policy and strategy, HR systems, and promoting Health & Wellbeing for colleagues. Their participation offers the business a unique perspective and has helped promote inclusivity for colleagues.

❝ We collaborate widely across the organisation to ensure colleagues voices are heard. We are often approached to consult on internal projects and work closely with our Senior Sponsor to promote visibility of the group.

The passion, dedication, and commitment within the group to achieving our vison and objectives is what drives us forward. Everyone is accepting of each other, and we have created a psychologically safe space for members to highlight opportunities for growth and development. ❞

Laura Cochrane, Chair of Diversability Group

Over the duration of the plan, our goal has been to ensure colleagues with protected characteristics feel heard, respected and fulfilled at work, recognising this is particularly important in the challenging operating context described above. A big part of our work in this area has been listening to and learning from our employee networks, including our new Diversability Network for disabled colleagues. We have worked to maintain the high level of employee engagement and effective employee voice. Although recruitment has significantly decreased, we have carried out analysis of our recruitment data and continue to develop good practice around recruitment, including enhancing staff CPD. We will carry forward our strategic commitment to continue working to become an anti-racist organisation into our new equality outcomes.

We have delivered the following actions identified in our 2021-25 report against Outcome Five, in addition to the activity detailed in our **2023 report**.

5a. Adopt different approaches to recruitment with the intent of achieving greater inclusion in recruitment outcomes

We have continued to develop our inclusive recruitment practices. In 2022 we engaged with the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO), as part of the Scottish Government funded Race for Human Rights programme, to undertake a review of our recruitment processes. To further ensure our approach was evidence led, we then undertook a deep dive analysis of recruitment data from 2017-21 to understand what areas present the greatest opportunity for improvement in selection outcomes for minority ethnic candidates.

This helped us understand some of the factors affecting outcomes. For example, minority ethnic applicants were significantly more likely to apply for roles where they do not meet the minimum requirement, such as holding a required qualification, or within age band for young talent.

This analysis, coupled with priorities identified by black/minority ethnic colleagues have informed a range of improvements in practice. We have updated our recruitment and selection training module to further embed equality and inclusion. This training allows managers to reflect on how to embed inclusion at every step from job design to selection. We have continued to deliver the License to Practice training for all people managers, which includes good practice on inclusive recruitment. We have also updated recruitment guidance to promote the importance and benefits of candidates receiving meaningful feedback from recruiting managers.

We have developed new survey questions within our recruitment portal and will continue to seek opportunities to improve candidates' experience.

5b. Take action to reduce our gender, race and disability pay gap

Our gender, disability and ethnicity pay gaps have decreased since 2023, as detailed at Annex B.

SDS continues to prioritise investment in pay to address areas of inequality within the SDS workforce. In our 2023 and 2024 pay reviews, our pay awards were weighted towards lower and mid-level grades, where a higher proportion of our female, disabled and minority ethnic workforce can be found. As noted above we have also made a range of improvements to recruitment and selection practice to embed inclusive practice and enable equal access to career progression.

5c. Through implementation of the Fair Work Action Plan, maintain the high level of employee engagement and effective employee voice, particularly in relation to protected and under-represented groups

We are committed to maintaining the high level of employee engagement and effective employee voice, particularly in relation to protected and under-represented groups. The response rate of 85% to our colleague survey in 2024 demonstrates a strong employee voice.

To support high levels of employee engagement we:

- updated our Wellbeing at Work Strategy in 2024, where we set out our vision for how SDS can enable colleagues to look after their physical, mental and social wellbeing at work

- introduced two weeks of paid Miscarriage Leave in 2024 to provide support to those experiencing pregnancy loss in the first 24 weeks of pregnancy (including for the individual who experiences the miscarriage, their partner or surrogacy or adoption parents)

- implemented a 'day one' right to contractual Maternity, Paternity Adoption and Shared Parental Leave/ Pay and extended contractual paternity pay from two to three weeks

- introduced support for colleagues during peri/menopause, through menopause guidance, a virtual menopause café and a private menopause support forum

- introduced a private forum for colleagues with caring responsibilities for adult dependants to come together to offer moral support and practical advice

- introduced a paid Inclusion and Wellbeing Day for colleagues in 2023, enabling colleagues to spend time on cultural, community or other activities that are important to them.

We have undertaken deep dive analysis of employee engagement survey outcomes to understand the experiences of groups with different protected characteristics and to help inform future actions.

5d. Implement a strategy for Race Equality at SDS incorporating capability, culture, career progression and public commitment

Our ongoing commitment to race equality is evidenced from the commitment made in our Strategic Plan 2022-27 to become an anti-racist organisation. SDS is also a signatory of Business in the Community's 'Race at Work Charter'.

Initially our work in this regard was taken forward through a Race Equality Steering Group, including representation from our trade unions and BAME employee network. SDS have subsequently worked to progress key recommendations of the group. This includes the work to develop recruitment practices noted above. In our 2023 'Diversity in Action' week senior leaders partnered with Unison SDS Branch Equality Officer to host an online Q&A. Titled 'How do we stay firm in our Commitment to Race Equity in Challenging Times', this discussed how to create the right conditions for organisational culture and inclusion.

Meanwhile 'It's About Race' Training sessions have been delivered to colleagues across SDS by the Diversity Trust. This training has had a focus on improving understanding of various forms of racism, inequality and bias affecting the Black, Asian and minority Communities in Scotland and across the UK. The sessions aim to equip participants with the tools and techniques necessary

to improve relationships and challenge overt as well as more subtle racial prejudice, including micro-aggressions. To date, 273 colleagues have completed the learning and additional sessions have been offered to meet high demand. Training has received positive feedback from colleagues; 96.3% agreed that the learning will improve their understanding of racism and the barriers it presents and 92.6% agreed the learning will inform positive behaviours in relation to race within SDS.

5e. Further develop our existing range of employee network groups, including those for LGBT and Minority Ethnic' colleagues, enabling lived experience to influence policy development and workplace practices.

We established a network group for disabled colleagues in 2023. The launch of the Diversability network group has provided the opportunity for colleagues to share experiences and allowed SDS to learn from the lived experience of disabled colleagues. The Diversability network group were involved in, for example, improving the reasonable adjustment process and work to ensure systems are accessible.

Our refreshed Pride Unified network group offers confidential support and advice regarding any LGBTI+ related matters to all staff. It raises awareness of LGBTI+ issues and provides a forum for action and discussion. The group has overseen the roll out of rainbow lanyards, EDI button badges and the addition of colleague pronouns to email signatures and Microsoft Teams. In addition, the network supports Pride events across Scotland, along with days including Purple Friday/Rainbow Laces, to demonstrate the importance of LGBTI+ inclusion. Signage has been developed for centres and community venues, and for use at events. The network worked with data analysts to ensure changes to customers' pronouns could be recorded accurately in our customer database.

We identified Senior Sponsors for the employee network groups to provide a commitment from Directors to listen and learn from lived experience within the organisation. This will also ensure a collaborative approach between groups.

SDS is engaged with other Scottish public sector employers to share our experiences and learn best practice from other organisations in relation to employee network groups.

Our BAME network group paused activity during the period, as the group felt that SDS would benefit from accessing external expert race equality advice. We recognise the need to act as a learning organisation in this regard and to continue to develop our strategic plans towards becoming an anti-racist organisation. SDS intend to continue to seek ways to collaborate with ethnic minority colleagues, ensuring their lived experiences help inform and determine approaches.

5f. Continue to demonstrate SDS as a best practice LGBT inclusive employer, with a focus on intersectionality.

SDS last submitted to the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2022 ranking 29th out of 403 UK employers. This recognised our progress on lesbian, gay, bi and trans inclusion in the workplace. Participation in the index has therefore been useful in benchmarking and improving SDS practice in this regard. Recognising wider resource constraints and the relative maturity of our practice we have since focused on engagement with our Pride Unified network to identify bespoke opportunities to improve colleague experience.

5g. Develop Positive Action opportunities for under-represented groups to access and progress in work, particularly in relation to our Young Talent Programme, leadership development and informal mentoring offer

Our ability to offer Positive Action opportunities after 2022 has been greatly diminished by financial constraints and the associated significant reduction in recruitment to SDS. This has led to fewer opportunities in our 'Young Talent Programme' in particular. Nonetheless, SDS have continued to progress other developments which support an inclusive environment.

In 2023 we launched a Model of Leadership Attributes for SDS, underpinned by our values and culture of 'Everyday Leadership'. These include a specific focus on Inclusive Leadership, emphasising that leaders must be able to set the ambition to embed equality, diversity and inclusion into everything we do in relation to providing services for our customers and throughout the SDS employee lifecycle.

SDS launched a mentoring pilot in 2021. This included a specific focus on targeting minority ethnic colleagues who were interested in career progression. We have subsequently rolled out a new digital mentoring platform 'Mentoring at SDS'. Mentoring is a central part of our ambition to create, sustain and develop a diverse workforce in which talented people maximise their contribution and potential. The new peer-to-peer learning offer matches individuals based on shared skills and professional goals. The informal mentoring scheme encourages colleagues to form valuable, relatable connections and learn from others that they may not otherwise meet.

4. Future monitoring and reporting

The work and ambitions highlighted through our equality objectives, and the wider content of this Mainstreaming Report, are very much ongoing, and progress against these will continue to be monitored and reported internally on that basis. We will continue to take a cross-organisational approach to ensuring progress is made against each of our equality outcomes.

An interim update on progress against our equality outcomes will be reported in our next Mainstreaming Report, due in 2027. Prior to that, some actions and measures will also be reported via other SDS corporate publications and the publication of official statistics.

Annex A

Our workforce data provides the evidence to inform our work to further embed and mainstream equality in all that we do.

The Specific Duties require public bodies to publish an annual breakdown of our employee data by composition, recruitment, development and retention and we have detailed this information below.

In all the tables featured in Annex A and B we have masked numbers to avoid the potential identification of individuals. Any figures less than five have been replaced with an asterisk (*). To ensure numbers could not be calculated by subtracting from the total number of employees, where necessary, we have also replaced a second value with an asterisk. Where we can confirm there are no employees in a particular group or category, we show this is shown as '- -' in the tables.

Annex A includes:

- **Table A1: SDS headcount by equality group**

- **Table A2: SDS new starts by equality group**

- **Table A3: SDS leavers by equality group**

- **Table A4: SDS promotions by equality group**

- **Table A5: SDS development by equality group**

In each of the listed sections above, we present the total number of SDS employees, broken down by relevant protected characteristics. The SDS headcount equality data is analysed as at 31 of March. The development data captures the average number of hours of development for those in the headcount report. New starts, leavers and promotions are based on information between the 1st of April to the 31st of March for each year.

General trends

In the context of public sector funding cuts and how they have impacted SDS, we significantly reduced the amount of recruitment to SDS. We also introduced a voluntary severance and voluntary early retirement offer to employees. The impact of this is evidenced in the following tables with:

- 300 fewer employees working at SDS since 2021. This is a 18% reduction in headcount.

- 58 fewer new starts in 2024/25, than in 2020/21. This is a 70% reduction in new starts.

- 74 fewer promotions in 2024/25, than in 2020/21. This is a 70% reduction in number of promotions.

Against that background, the data shows that there has been little change in the diversity of SDS since 2021, particularly in relation to sex, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. Some other trends include:

- Fewer employees aged 16-24 years old. This is a result of significantly reduced recruitment, leading to fewer opportunities in our 'Young Talent Programme'.

- An increase in leavers from the 50+ age group. This is partly influenced by the Voluntary Severance and Voluntary Early Retirement offer, where colleagues over 50 were more likely to apply.

- There is a similar percentage of minority ethnic colleagues. 2.0% of colleagues were from a minority ethnic community in 2021, this is now 2.4%.

- Disabled colleagues now make up 8.7% of SDS, this was 7.1% in 2021.

We have maintained the high number of employees reporting their diversity monitoring information, with low numbers of colleagues reporting "prefer not to say" or "no response".

We can see no substantive barriers for different protected characteristics in accessing CPD. In any area we do see a variance, we have reviewed the reasons for this. This has clarified that the reasons are driven by specific personal circumstance amongst relatively small groups.

Table A1: SDS headcount by equality group

This table shows how many employees work at SDS at the 31st of March of each year, broken down by the different equality groups.

Headcount Table A1: SDS Headcount by Equality Group	2021 no.	2021 %	2022 no.	2022 %	2023 no.	2023 %	2024 no.	2024 %	2025 no	2025 %	Variance
Headcount	1660		1640		1614		1443		1360		
Age Range											
16-24	89	5.4%	51	3.1%	52	3.2%	24	1.7%	17	1.2%	−4.2%
25-34	281	16.9%	286	17.4%	274	17.0%	246	17.0%	217	15.9%	−1.0%
35-49	651	39.2%	622	37.9%	618	38.3%	561	38.9%	539	39.6%	+0.4%
50+	639	38.5%	681	41.5%	670	41.5%	612	42.4%	587	43.2%	+4.7%
Disability											
Yes	118	7.1%	125	7.6%	131	8.1%	122	8.5%	118	8.7%	+1.6%
No	1483	89.3%	1446	88.2%	1420	88.0%	1258	87.2%	1186	87.2%	−2.1%
Prefer not to say	32	1.9%	33	2.0%	31	1.9%	31	2.1%	26	1.9%	--
No response	27	1.6%	36	2.2%	32	2.0%	32	2.2%	30	2.2%	+0.6%
Sex											
Female	1183	71.3%	1172	71.5%	1155	71.6%	979	71.9%	977	71.8%	+0.5%
Male	477	28.7%	468	28.5%	459	28.4%	379	27.8%	378	27.8%	−0.9%
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	*
No response	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	*
Gender Reassignment											
Yes	*	*	6	0.4%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
No	1569	94.5%	1540	93.9%	1525	94.5%	1365	94.6%	1289	94.8%	+0.3%
Prefer not to say	49	3.0%	46	2.8%	*	*	34	2.4%	31	2.3%	−0.7%
No response	*	*	48	2.9%	44	2.7%	*	*	*	*	*
Ethnic Group											
White	1521	91.6%	1485	90.5%	1464	90.7%	1286	89.1%	1215	89.3%	−2.3%
White: Other	47	2.8%	49	3.0%	44	2.7%	62	4.3%	60	4.4%	+1.6%
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	*	*	6	0.4%	9	0.6%	9	0.6%	7	0.5%	*
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	15	0.9%	16	1.0%	18	1.1%	15	1.0%	15	1.1%	+0.2%
African, Caribbean or Black	13	0.8%	14	0.9%	12	0.7%	10	0.7%	10	0.7%	−0.1%
Other Ethnic Group	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	34	2.0%	35	2.1%	32	2.0%	27	1.9%	23	1.7%	−0.3%
No response	25	1.5%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Religion or Belief											
Buddhist	5	0.3%	5	0.3%	5	0.3%	*	*	*	*	*
Catholic	272	16.4%	259	15.8%	255	15.8%	226	15.7%	211	15.5%	−0.9%
Other Christian	112	6.8%	109	6.6%	106	6.6%	99	6.9%	94	6.9%	+0.1%
Church of Scotland	321	19.2%	318	19.4%	309	19.1%	276	19.1%	261	19.2%	--
Hindu	5	0.3%	5	0.3%	6	0.4%	*	*	*	*	*
Jewish	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Muslim	5	0.3%	6	0.4%	6	0.4%	6	0.4%	6	0.4%	+0.1%
Sikh	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Pagan	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Another Religion or Belief	17	1.0%	15	0.9%	15	0.9%	12	0.8%	11	0.8%	−0.2%
None	720	43.7%	707	43.1%	713	44.2%	636	44.1%	608	44.7%	+1.0%
Prefer not to say	163	9.6%	165	10.1%	149	9.2%	131	9.1%	117	8.6%	−1.0%
No response	34	2.0%	45	2.7%	43	2.7%	44	3.0%	39	2.9%	+0.9%
Sexual Orientation											
Heterosexual/Straight	1467	88.4%	1448	88.3%	1429	88.5%	1277	88.5%	1207	88.8%	+0.4%
Gay or Lesbian/Bisexual/Other	69	4.3%	65	4.0%	69	4.3%	61	4.2%	61	4.5%	+0.2%
Prefer not to say	99	5.8%	93	5.7%	83	5.1%	71	4.9%	62	4.6%	−1.3%
No response	25	1.5%	34	2.1%	33	2.0%	34	2.4%	31	2.3%	+0.8%

Table A2: SDS new starts by equality group

This table shows the number of employees who started working at SDS each year, broken down by the different equality groups.

New Starts Table A2: SDS New Starts by Equality Group	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25		Variance
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
Total new starts	86		106		64		20		28		
Age Range											
16-24	42	48.8%	38	35.8%	13	20.3%	*	*	*	*	*
25-34	13	15.1%	34	32.1%	17	26.6%	6	30.0%	8	28.6%	+13.5%
35-49	20	23.3%	20	18.9%	28	43.8%	7	35.0%	15	53.6%	+30.3%
50+	11	12.8%	14	13.2%	6	9.4%	*	*	*	*	*
Disability											
Yes	8	9.3%	14	13.2%	5	7.8%	*	*	*	*	*
No	74	86.0%	56	52.8%	49	76.6%	16	80.0%	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
Sex											
Female	51	59.3%	62	58.5%	36	56.3%	13	65.0%	20	71.4%	+12.1%
Male	35	40.7%	44	41.5%	28	43.8%	7	35.0%	8	28.6%	−12.1%
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
No response	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gender Reassignment											
Yes	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
No	81	94.2%	72	67.9%	54	84.4%	*	*	28	100.0%	+5.8%
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
Ethnic Group											
White	72	83.7%	53	50.0%	47	73.4%	14	70.0%	25	89.3%	+5.6%
White: Other	6	7.0%	12	11.3%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
African, Caribbean or Black	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	*	*
Other Ethnic Group	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*
Prefer not to say	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
No response	*	*	33	31.1%	9	14.1%	*	*	--	--	*
Religion or Belief											
Buddhist	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Catholic	10	11.6%	*	*	6	9.4%	*	*	*	*	*
Other Christian	8	9.3%	5	4.7%	*	*	--	--	*	*	*
Church of Scotland	6	7.0%	10	9.4%	8	12.5%	*	*	*	*	*
Hindu	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--
Jewish	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--
Muslim	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
Sikh	*	*	--	--	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
Pagan	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Another Religion or Belief	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
None	55	64.0%	47	44.3%	32	50.0%	8	40.0%	20	71.4%	+7.4%
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
No response	*	*	36	34.0%	9	14.1%	*	*	--	--	*
Sexual Orientation											
Heterosexual/Straight	67	77.9%	65	61.3%	47	73.4%	14	70.0%	*	*	*
Gay or Lesbian/Bisexual/Other	14	16.3%	7	6.6%	5	7.8%	*	*	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*

Table A3: SDS leavers by equality group

This table shows the number of employees who left SDS each year, broken down by the different equality groups.

Leavers Table A3: SDS Leavers by Equality Group	2020/21 no.	2020/21 %	2021/22 no.	2021/22 %	2022/23 no.	2022/23 %	2023/24 no.	2023/24 %	2024/25 no.	2024/25 %	Variance
Total leavers	94		115		124		185		111		
Age Range											
16-24	9	9.6%	23	20.0%	13	10.5%	11	5.9%	*	*	*
25-34	8	8.5%	32	27.8%	28	22.6%	30	16.2%	19	17.1%	+8.6%
35-49	23	24.5%	15	13.0%	24	19.4%	46	24.9%	*	*	*
50+	54	57.4%	45	39.1%	59	47.6%	98	53.0%	74	66.7%	+9.3%
Disability											
Yes	9	9.6%	5	4.3%	14	11.3%	22	11.9%	13	11.7%	+2.1%
No	79	84.0%	88	76.5%	100	80.6%	*	*	93	83.6%	−0.2%
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*	*
Sex											
Female	65	69.1%	71	61.7%	71	57.3%	127	68.6%	80	72.1%	+3.0%
Male	29	30.9%	44	38.3%	53	42.7%	58	31.4%	31	27.9%	−3.0%
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
No response	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gender Reassignment											
Yes	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	--	--	--
No	82	87.2%	94	81.7%	107	86.3%	176	95.1%	105	94.6%	+7.4%
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	7	5.6%	6	3.2%	*	*	*
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Ethnic Group											
White	80	85.1%	84	73.0%	104	83.9%	166	89.7%	97	87.4%	+2.3%
White: Other	*	*	10	8.7%	7	5.6%	10	5.4%	*	*	*
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	*
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
African, Caribbean or Black	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Other Ethnic Group	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	*	*	--	--	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
No response	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Religion or Belief											
Buddhist	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--
Catholic	19	20.2%	16	13.9%	20	16.1%	30	16.2%	19	17.1%	−3.1%
Other Christian	*	*	8	7.0%	8	6.5%	9	4.9%	6	5.4%	*
Church of Scotland	22	23.4%	11	9.6%	21	16.9%	34	18.4%	19	17.1%	−6.3%
Hindu	--	--	--	--	*	*	*	*	--	--	--
Jewish	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	*	*
Muslim	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--
Sikh	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Pagan	--	--	--	--	--	--	*	*	--	--	--
Another Religion or Belief	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
None	36	38.3%	50	43.5%	48	38.7%	88	47.6%	51	45.9%	+7.6%
Prefer not to say	9	9.6%	*	*	18	14.5%	14	7.6%	12	10.8%	+1.2%
No response	*	*	21	18.3%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Sexual Orientation											
Heterosexual/Straight	77	81.9%	76	66.1%	98	79.0%	161	87.0%	97	87.4%	+5.5%
Gay or Lesbian/Bisexual/Other	7	7.4%	13	11.3%	10	8.1%	12	6.5%	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	*	*	5	4.3%	*	*	*	*	9	8.1%	*
No response	*	*	21	18.3%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

Table A4: SDS promotions by equality group

This table shows the number of employees who were promoted in SDS each year, broken down by the different equality groups.

Promotions Table A4: SDS Promotions by Equality Group	2020/21		2021/22		2022/23		2023/24		2024/25		Variance
	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%	
Total promotions	105		136		60		33		31		
Age Range											
16-24	12	11.4%	11	8.1%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
25-34	36	34.3%	57	41.9%	*	*	12	36.4%	10	32.3%	-2.0%
35-49	37	35.2%	47	34.6%	19	31.7%	16	48.5%	15	48.4%	+13.2%
50+	20	19.0%	21	15.4%	20	33.3%	*	*	*	*	*
Disability											
Yes	*	*	7	5.1%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
No	100	95.2%	124	91.2%	55	91.7%	*	*	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--
No response	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sex											
Female	77	73.3%	96	70.6%	47	78.3%	8	24.2%	23	74.2%	+0.9%
Male	28	26.7%	40	29.4%	13	21.7%	25	75.8%	8	25.8%	-0.9%
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
No response	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Gender Reassignment											
Yes	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	*
No	100	95.2%	128	94.1%	58	96.7%	*	*	31	100.0%	+4.8%
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*
No response	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
Ethnic Group											
White	99	94.3%	120	88.2%	53	88.3%	31	93.9%	*	*	*
White: Other	*	*	7	5.1%	5	8.3%	--	--	--	--	*
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	--	--	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*	--	--	*
African, Caribbean or Black	*	*	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*
Other Ethnic Group	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Prefer not to say	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*	*	*	*
No response	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
Religion or Belief											
Buddhist	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Catholic	17	16.2%	14	10.3%	6	10.0%	*	*	*	*	*
Other Christian	9	8.6%	7	5.1%	7	11.7%	*	*	*	*	*
Church of Scotland	15	14.3%	22	16.2%	12	20.0%	5	15.2%	5	16.1%	+1.8%
Hindu	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	*
Jewish	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Muslim	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sikh	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Pagan	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Another Religion or Belief	*	*	*	*	--	--	--	--	*	*	*
None	54	51.4%	76	55.9%	29	48.3%	21	63.6%	17	54.8%	+3.4%
Prefer not to say	*	*	11	8.1%	6	10.0%	*	*	*	*	*
No response	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sexual Orientation											
Heterosexual/Straight	94	89.5%	121	89.0%	55	91.7%	*	*	26	83.9%	-5.6%
Gay or Lesbian/Bisexual/Other	6	5.7%	9	6.6%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Prefer not to say	5	4.8%	*	*	*	*	--	--	*	*	*
No response	--	--	*	*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Table A5: SDS development by equality group

This table shows the average number of hours of continuous professional development (CPD) SDS colleagues have completed each year, broken down by the different equality groups.

Development (CPD) Table A5: SDS Development by Equality Group	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	Variance
Overall Average CPD Hours	38	35	34	32	33	-5
Age Range						
16-24	54	42	54	41	45	-9
25-34	38	36	34	35	39	+1
35-49	35	35	33	32	32	-3
50+	39	35	34	31	31	-8
Disability						
Yes	41	40	39	34	33	-8
No	38	35	34	32	33	-5
Prefer not to say	57	37	29	30	34	-23
No response	28	31	31	27	27	-1
Sex						
Female	37	36	35	32	30	-7
Male	40	34	33	31	34	-6
Prefer not to say	--	--	--	26	23	+23
No response	--	--	--	16	17	+17
Gender Reassignment						
Yes	67	31	29	34	23	-44
No	38	36	35	32	33	-5
Prefer not to say	38	26	24	30	28	-10
No response	23	28	27	27	24	+1
Ethnic Group						
White	38	35	34	32	33	-5
White: Other	40	38	41	33	30	-10
Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups	27	37	28	28	21	-6
Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian	52	65	74	38	42	-10
African, Caribbean or Black	57	43	51	29	26	-31
Other Ethnic Group	31	21	24	20	34	+3
Prefer not to say	37	25	25	25	29	-8
No response	25	33	27	25	25	--
Religion or Belief						
Buddhist	32	27	26	29	24	-8
Catholic	41	33	35	30	30	-11
Other Christian	36	37	36	31	35	-1
Church of Scotland	38	34	35	32	32	-6
Hindu	103	157	101	68	96	-7
Jewish	24	25	26	23	28	+4
Muslim	47	42	65	25	24	-23
Sikh	30	56	41	44	40	+10
Pagan	52	24	25	23	26	-27
Another Religion or Belief	31	28	29	27	27	-4
None	38	35	34	33	34	-4
Prefer not to say	38	37	33	33	31	-7
No response	24	30	27	25	25	+1
Sexual Orientation						
Heterosexual/Straight	37	36	35	32	33	-4
Gay or Lesbian/Bisexual/Other	56	34	41	39	31	-25
Prefer not to say	40	31	28	29	32	-8
No response	23	30	28	25	25	+2

Annex B

This annex includes:

- SDS equal pay statement

- SDS equal pay audit

- Table B1: Occupational distribution by gender

- Table B2: Gender pay gap by grade

- Table B3: Percentage of staff part-time by grade

- Table B4: Occupation distribution by ethnicity

- Ethnicity pay gap

- Table B5: Occupation distribution by disability

- Disability pay gap

- Pregnancy and maternity

- Disciplinary and grievance

The tables in Annex B do not include colleagues who chose 'Prefer not to say'.

SDS equal pay statement

We recognise that all employees should receive equal pay for doing equal work or work of equal value, in line with the Equality Act 2010.

We are committed to continuing our work with our recognised trade unions to take action to promote and implement equal pay. SDS is also committed to operating a pay and reward system which is transparent, based on objective criteria and free from bias and we will continue to work towards reducing any identified pay gap.

Going forward SDS will continue to ensure that equal pay and equality considerations are embedded in development of our pay and grading framework and are routinely considered in pay negotiations with our trade union partners.

SDS equal pay audit

- Our mean gender pay gap has continued to decrease from 8.0% in 2021, to 7.6% in 2023 and now to 6.1% in 2025. The gender pay gap has reduced annually since 2010, when SDS reported a 15.7% mean gender pay gap. The median gender pay gap at SDS is 0%.

- There is no pay grade where the mean gender pay gap is greater than 5%, which is the threshold where EHRC advise investigation.

- At SDS pay grades 'Intern', '3A', '3CD' and '4A', '7C' and '8' the gap is in favour of women. It is important to emphasise that SDS is not solely addressing equality issues through pay frameworks, we are developing other actions to increase equality of opportunity and secure a meaningful and sustained reduction in our gender pay gap.

- Our mean disability pay gap is now 6.1%, down from 8.8% in 2023 and 7.1% in 2021. This calculates the average hourly rate of disabled colleagues as a percentage of the average hourly rate of colleagues who are not disabled. The median disability pay gap at SDS is 0%.

- Our mean ethnicity pay gap is now 8.8%, down from 10.1% in 2023, but up from 6.8% in 2021. This calculates the average hourly rate of minority ethnic colleagues as a percentage of the hourly rate of white colleagues. Minority ethnic includes colleagues who select "Asian, British Asian, Scottish Asian", "African, Caribbean or Black", "Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity" or "Other Ethnicities" on their diversity monitoring form. The median ethnicity pay gap at SDS is 0%.

Table B1: Occupational distribution by gender

This table shows the number of males and females in the organisation at each pay grade. The '% of Grade columns' shows what percentage of that grade is male or female. For example, at 'SDS 4CD' which is the grade of our Careers Advisers, 78.4% are female. The '% of Gender column' shows what % of all males or females at SDS are at that pay grade. For example, its shows that of all 977 females at SDS, 51.2% of them are in pay grade 'SDS 4CD'.

Occupation Segregation Gender — Table B1: Occupational Distribution by Gender	Grade	Number of		TOTAL	% of Grade		% of Gender	
		Female	Male		Female	Male	Female	Male
Trainee	MA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Intern	*	*	7	*	*	*	*
Professional and Technical	SDS 3A	39	17	56	69.6%	30.4%	4.0%	4.5%
	SDS 3CD	53	9	62	85.5%	14.5%	5.4%	2.4%
	SDS 4A	92	54	146	63.0%	37.0%	9.4%	14.3%
	SDS 4CD	500	138	638	78.4%	21.6%	51.2%	36.5%
Manager	SDS 5	175	87	264	66.3%	33.0%	17.9%	23.0%
	SDS 6	83	39	124	66.9%	31.5%	8.5%	10.3%
Leadership	SDS 7A	*	*	12	*	*	*	*
	SDS 7B	16	14	30	53.3%	46.7%	1.6%	3.7%
	SDS 7C	*	*	9	*	*	*	*
Senior Leadership/Chief Executive	SDS8	*	*	9	*	*	*	*
	SNRD	*	*	3	*	*	*	*
	Total	977	378	1360	71.8%	27.8%		

This table helps show what pay grades at SDS have a higher percentage of males or females than the overall population. This shows that at SDS 4CD and 3CD, which are the grades delivering our Careers Information, Advice and Guidance service offer, there is a higher percentage of females than the overall population of SDS. However, the overall population of our Leadership pay grades (SDS 7A, 7B and 7C) is 57% female. Although there are more females at these grades, it is lower than the overall gender breakdown. The overall trend shows that the percentage of males at each grade increase as you go up the pay grades, and the percentage of females decrease.

Table B2: Gender pay gap by grade

This table shows the 'mean' gender pay gap, at each pay grade at SDS. This gender pay gap is a calculation to show the difference in average pay between males and females. This is done by dividing the average female pay by the average male pay and then showing it as a percentage. For example, at pay grade 'SDS 6' this shows that the average female pay is 1.6% lower than the average male pay at that grade.

Equal Pay Audit	Grade	Female pay as a % of male pay	Pay Gap %
Trainee	MA	--	--
	Intern	100.9%	+0.9%
Professional and Technical	SDS 3A	101.4%	+1.4%
	SDS 3CD	103.4%	+3.4%
	SDS 4A	101.9%	+1.9%
	SDS 4CD	100.0%	--
Manager	SDS 5	99.2%	−0.8%
	SDS 6	98.4%	−1.6%
Leadership	SDS 7A	99.4%	−0.6%
	SDS 7B	100.0%	--
	SDS 7C	101.9%	+1.9%
Senior Leadership / Chief Executive	SDS8	101.0%	+1.0%
	SNRD	--	--
	Total	**93.9%**	**−6.1%**

(-) indicates a pay gap in favour of males   (+) indicates a pay gap in favour of females

The average hourly rate of females at SDS is £27.18 and for males it is £28.93. This means that there is a 6.1% mean gender pay gap at SDS. This is has reduced by 1.9% since 2021, where we reported the gap as 8.0%.

The SDS Median Gender Pay Gap is 0%. This is calculated by finding the 'middle' hourly rate for males and females, sorted from highest earners to lowest. This is then divided and shown as a percentage.

Median hourly pay for female employees at SDS is £25.90, and for male employees, the median hourly rate is £25.90.

Table B3: Percentage of staff part-time by grade

This table shows what % of employees at each pay grade works part-time hours. Part-time is anyone who works less than 35 hours per week. For example, at SDS pay grade 'SDS 4CD', 33.9% of employees at that grade work part-time.

In the % of SDS part-time column, this shows what % of all part-time staff are in that pay grade. For example, 13.6% of all part-time workers at SDS are in pay grade 'SDS 5'.

Part Time	Grade	% of grade part-time	% of SDS part-time
Trainee	MA	--	--
	Intern	--	--
Professional and Technical	SDS 3A	16.1%	2.7%
	SDS 3CD	53.2%	10.0%
	SDS 4A	8.9%	3.9%
	SDS 4CD	33.9%	65.5%
Manager	SDS 5	17.0%	13.6%
	SDS 6	10.5%	3.9%
Leadership	SDS 7A	--	--
	SDS 7B	--	--
	SDS 7C	--	--
Senior Leadership / Chief Executive	SDS8	11.1%	0.3%
	SNRD	--	--

24% of overall workforce are part-time – 6% of men and 31% of women

At SDS, 24% of all colleagues work part-time – 6% of all males and 31% of all females. In addition, 19% of colleagues work compressed hours. This results in 43% of colleagues at SDS having a flexible working pattern.

Table B4: Occupation distribution by ethnicity

This table shows the number of people from different ethnic groups in SDS at each pay grade. The '% of Grade columns' shows what percentage of that grade is either from a 'White, White(other), or 'Minority Ethnic' Group. For example, at 'SDS 4CD' which is the grade of our Careers Advisers, 3.0% are Minority Ethnic. The **'% of Ethnicity column'** shows what % of all minority ethnic colleagues are at that pay grade. For example, its shows of the 33 minority ethnic colleagues at SDS, 57.6% of them are in pay grade 'SDS 4CD'.

Occupation Segregation Ethnicity Table B4: Occupation Distribution by Ethnicity	Grade	Number of			TOTAL	% of Grade			% of Ethnicity		
		Minority Ethnic	White	White Other		Minority Ethnic	White	White Other	Minority Ethnic	White	White Other
Trainee	MA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Intern	*	*	--	7	*	*	--	*	*	--
Professional and Technical	SDS 3A	*	48	*	56	*	85.7%	*	*	4.0%	*
	SDS 3CD	*	57	*	62	*	91.9%	*	*	4.7%	*
	SDS 4A	*	130	*	146	*	89.0%	*	*	10.7%	*
	SDS 4CD	19	576	25	638	3.0%	90.3%	3.9%	57.6%	47.4%	41.7%
Manager	SDS 5	5	229	21	264	1.9%	86.7%	8.0%	15.2%	18.8%	35.0%
	SDS 6	*	112	*	124	*	90.3%	*	*	9.2%	*
Leadership	SDS 7A	--	*	*	12	--	*	*	--	*	*
	SDS 7B	--	*	*	30	--	*	*	--	*	*
	SDS 7C	--	*	*	9	--	*	*	--	*	*
Senior Leadership / Chief Executive	SDS8	--	*	*	9	--	*	*	--	*	*
	SNRD	--	*	*	3	--	*	*	--	*	*
	Total	**33**	**1215**	**60**	**1360**	**2.4%**	**89.3%**	**4.4%**			

Due to low number of minority ethnic colleagues[13] at most of the SDS pay grades, only figures at SDS 4CD and SDS 5 can be reported. This limits any meaningful analysis if this data. There are no minority ethnic colleagues in our 'Leadership' or 'Senior Leadership' Grades.

13 **Minority ethnic** includes colleagues who select "Asian, British Asian, Scottish Asian", "African, Caribbean or Black", "Mixed or Multiple Ethnicity" or "Other Ethnicities" on their diversity monitoring form. **'White: Other'** includes colleagues who select 'White: Polish', 'White: Irish', 'White – Any other ethnic Group', White: 'Gypsy/ Traveller', 'White: Showman/ showwoman' and 'White: Roma'. **White** includes colleagues who select 'White: Scottish' or 'White: Other British'.

Ethnicity pay gap

The **mean ethnicity pay gap** at SDS is 8.8%. The mean hourly rate for Minority Ethnic colleagues is £25.24 and for White colleagues it is £27.67. The mean ethnicity pay gap has narrowed by 1.3% since 2023, where we reported a 10.1% gap.

The **median ethnicity pay gap** is 0.0%. Median hourly pay for Minority Ethnic employees is £25.90, and for White employees, the median hourly rate is £25.90. This is a reduction since 2023, where we reported a 4.4% median ethnicity pay gap.

Table B5: Occupation distribution by disability

This table shows the number of disabled in SDS at each pay grade. The **'% of Grade columns'** shows what percentage of that grade is Disabled or not. For example, at 'SDS 4CD' which is the grade of our Careers Advisers, 8.6% are disabled. The **'% of Disability column'** shows what percentage of all disabled colleagues are at that pay grade. For example, its shows that of the 118 disabled colleagues at SDS, 46.6% are in pay grade 'SDS 4CD'.

Occupational Segregation Disabled Table B2: Gender Pay Gap by Grade	Grade	Number of		TOTAL	% of Grade		% of disability	
		Disabled	Not Disabled		Disabled	Not Disabled	Disabled	Not Disabled
Trainee	MA	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Intern	*	*	7	*	*	*	*
Professional and Technical	SDS 3A	9	42	56	16.1	75.0%	7.6%	3.5%
	SDS 3CD	11	49	62	17.7%	79.0%	9.3%	4.1%
	SDS 4A	7	129	146	4.8%	88.4%	5.9%	10.9%
	SDS 4CD	55	558	638	8.6%	87.5%	46.6%	47.0%
Manager	SDS 5	23	232	264	8.7%	87.9%	19.5%	19.6%
	SDS 6	7	114	124	5.6%	91.9%	5.9%	9.6%
Leadership	SDS 7A	*	*	12	*	*	*	*
	SDS 7B	*	*	30	*	*	*	*
	SDS 7C	*	*	9	*	*	*	*
Senior Leadership / Chief Executive	SDS8	*	*	9	*	*	*	*
	SNRD	*	*	3	*	*	*	*
	Total	**118**	**1186**	**1360**	**8.7%**	**87.2%**		

Due to low numbers of disabled people in a number of SDS pay grades, many figures have had to be masked to avoid the potential identification of individuals. However, we have seen an increase in the % of disabled people in our 'Manager' grades at SDS (SDS 5 and SDS 6).

Disability pay gap

The **mean disability pay gap** at SDS is 6.1%. The mean hourly rate for disabled colleagues is £26.19 and for those not disabled it is £27.90. The mean disability pay gap has narrowed by 2.7% since 2023, where we reported an 8.8% gap.

The **median disability pay gap** is 0.0%. Median hourly pay for disabled colleagues is £25.90, and for colleagues not disabled it is £25.90. This is a reduction since 2023, where we reported a 3.5% median disability pay gap.
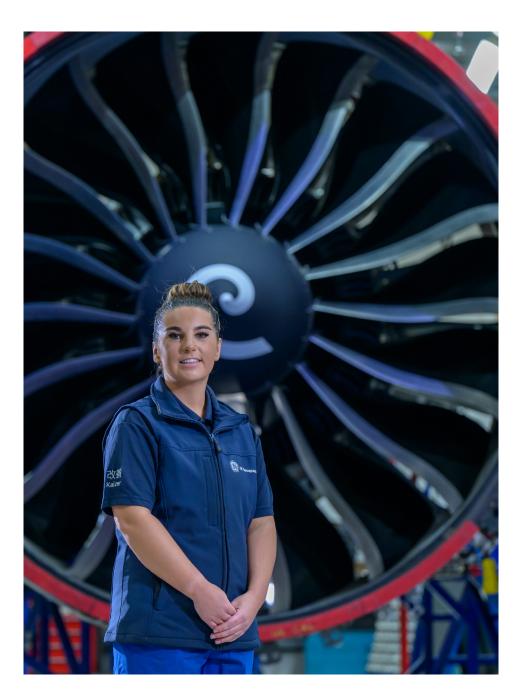
Pregnancy and Maternity

For the period 1 April 2023 – 31 March 2024 there were 29 employees who went on maternity leave (2.0% of the workforce). For those who returned from maternity leave within this period (29), 62.1% returned to their substantive post and hours, and the rest returned on reduced hours.

For the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025 there were 21 employees who went on maternity leave (1.5% of the workforce). For those who returned from maternity leave within this period (30), 70.0% returned to their substantive post and hours, and the rest returned on reduced hours.

Disciplinary and grievance

For the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024, there were 20 employees who went through a disciplinary or grievance process. Of those 20 people, 40% were female, and 60% were male. Due to low numbers, we can only provide analysis by sex.

For the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, there were fewer than 10 employees who went through a disciplinary or grievance process so we cannot provide any equality analysis.