SOUTH of SCOTLAND ENTERPRISE

SOSE Equality Mainstreaming Update

In and For the South of Scotland

Seonaid Mann

April 2025

Foreword

At South of Scotland Enterprise, we know that inclusive growth doesn't happen by accident — it takes intention, effort, and leadership. In this update, we set out how we are delivering on our equality duties as a public body, and the steps we are taking to ensure that every person, business, and community in the South of Scotland has a fair chance to thrive.

We are now two years into our current Equality Outcomes. This report is an opportunity to reflect on progress, take stock of what we've learned, and renew our focus on what matters most — creating a fairer, more inclusive region for all.

The challenges facing our communities are real and complex. Rising living costs, workforce pressures, and the transition to net zero are reshaping our economy and society. That's why our commitment goes beyond compliance. We are using our statutory responsibilities — including Fair Work First and the Fairer Scotland Duty — to embed fairness into everything we do: from funding and procurement to policy and programme design.

Our four Equality Outcomes guide this work. They focus on supporting diverse communities, advancing fair work, ensuring a just transition to net zero, and creating an inclusive workplace where everyone can succeed. We are proud of the progress we have made — from strengthening impact assessments and piloting inclusive programmes, to being recognised as a Level 2 Disability Confident employer and Carbon Literate Organisation.

But we also know there is more to do. Our commitment is to continual improvement — to listen, adapt, and lead with integrity. Equality must remain central to our mission, not just as a duty, but as a driver of change.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this work so far. Together, we will keep working to unlock talent, widen opportunity, and shape a South of Scotland where everyone can thrive.

Contents

1. Overview 5
   - 1.0 Introduction 5
2. Mainstreaming Equality 6
   - 2.0 Overview 6
   - 2.1 Strategy 6
   - 2.2 SOSE Key Themes 7
   - 2.3 Governance 10
   - 2.4 Equality Impact Assessments 10
   - 2.5 Communications 12
   - 2.6 Human Resources and Organisational Development 12
   - 2.7 Procurement 19
3. Impact Assessments 21
   - 3.0 Progress on Integrated Impact Assessments 21
   - 3.1 Embedding Inclusion in Organisational Practice 21
   - 3.2 Strengthening Equity in Service Delivery and External Programmes 22
   - 3.3 Key Themes and Organisational Learning 22
   - 3.4 Next Steps 23
4. Staff Data 24
   - 4.0 Gathering and Using Information 24
   - 4.1 Data on Each Protected Characteristic 24
   - 4.2 Recruitment and Selection 26
5. Gender Pay Report 28
   - 5.0 Equal Pay Gap 28
   - 5.1 Advancing Equality in Pay 28
   - 5.2 Equal Pay Policy 29
6. Equality Outcomes Progress 31
   - 6.0 Outcome 1 31

6.1 Outcome 2 32
6.2 Outcome 3 33
6.3 Outcome 4 34
7. Board Diversity 37
7.0 Background 37
7.1 South of Scotland Enterprise Board 37
7.2 Appointments in the Period 37
7.3 Appointment Process 38
7.4 Summary 38
8. Appendices 40
8.0 Impact Assessment Summary Findings 40
8.1 Diversity Data Dashboard 43

1. Overview

1.0 Introduction

1.0.0 As a public body, we have a statutory duty under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties)(Scotland) Regulations 2012 to report every two years on how we are meeting our equality obligations. This requirement ensures that we demonstrate accountability in embedding equality across our work and making measurable progress towards advancing equality in the South of Scotland.

1.0.1 Under these regulations, we must publish an update which includes:

- demonstrating how we are mainstreaming equality across all functions, ensuring that equality considerations are embedded in decision-making, service delivery, and employment practices
- reporting on how we have assessed the impact of our policies and practices
- providing an update on progress towards our equality outcomes, which are the specific objectives we have set to address inequalities and improve outcomes
- publishing workforce data, including information on the diversity of our staff and how we are addressing any inequalities within our workforce
- reporting on gender pay gap information, where applicable, and outlining any actions we are taking to reduce pay disparities.

1.0.2 This biennial reporting duty allows us to reflect on progress, identify challenges, and refine our approach to achieving greater equality. It also ensures that equality remains a continuous priority, rather than a one-off exercise, by requiring us to assess our actions, engage with communities and stakeholders, and commit to meaningful improvements.

1.0.3 Alongside reporting on how we aim to advance equality for those facing disadvantage due to protected characteristics or lived experience, this update also reflects the Fairer Scotland Duty. As socio-economic disadvantage often intersects with protected characteristics, both are considered in decision-making and service delivery.

1.0.4 Through this report, we provide a clear and transparent assessment of our work on equality since our last publication, ensuring that we meet our statutory obligations while driving forward an inclusive and fair South of Scotland.

2. Mainstreaming Equality

2.0 Overview

2.0.0 "Mainstreaming equality" means making sure that equality is a part of everything we do as an organisation. We want to make sure that we think about fairness and making sure everyone is treated well in every decision we make. We're proud to share the progress we've made so far, and we're excited to keep working towards a more equal society.

2.1 Strategy

2.1.0 SOSE's strategic direction is now shaped by our Five Year Plan (2023-28), which sets out the organisation's long-term priorities and framework for action. This plan replaces previous strategic approaches and provides a clear structure for how SOSE will contribute to the economic and social development of the South of Scotland.

2.1.1 The five-year plan is built around six strategic priorities that guide all decision-making and resource allocation:

- accelerating net zero and nature-positive solutions – supporting businesses and communities to adopt sustainable practices and contribute to Scotland's climate goals
- advocating for fair work and equality – promoting good employment practices, lifelong learning, and inclusion to create a fairer regional economy
- activating and empowering enterprising communities – strengthening social enterprises and community-led economic initiatives
- attracting ambitious investment – raising the profile of the South of Scotland to secure funding and improve infrastructure
- awakening entrepreneurial talent – supporting business start-ups, innovation, and creative industries to drive economic growth
- advancing innovation and improving productivity – helping enterprises adopt new technologies and improve their efficiency

2.1.2 The five-year plan also strengthens the mainstreaming of equality across all areas of SOSE's work. Fair work and equality are central to the plan, ensuring that economic growth benefits all communities, particularly those who experience disadvantage. The focus on empowering enterprising communities, improving job opportunities, and

ensuring a just transition to net zero all contribute to reducing inequalities of outcome.

2.1.3 Our People and Culture Strategy 2023-2025 outlines six strategic themes —Culture, Leadership, Employee Engagement, Learning and Development, Health and Wellbeing, and Ways of Working—that together create a values-driven, inclusive workplace where all employees can thrive.

2.1.4 The strategy promotes a positive culture built on accountability, integrity, and respect, with an explicit aim to reflect the diversity of the communities SOSE serves. It supports flexible, hybrid ways of working, recognises different approaches to development and leadership, and fosters a psychologically safe environment where feedback, collaboration, and innovation are encouraged. It also prioritises fair workloads, proactive wellbeing support, and an equitable employee experience.

2.1.5 By aligning people practices with organisational values and equality principles, the strategy ensures that all staff are treated fairly, supported to succeed, and empowered to contribute meaningfully to SOSE's mission.

2.2 SOSE Key Themes

2.2.0 Our work is focused on several overarching themes all of which are integral to global strategies for sustainable development and economic resilience and therefore aligned to the priorities of the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation and the South of Scotland Regional Economic Strategy. We actively include consideration of the need to mainstream equality in each theme.

2.2.1 Net Zero

- **Environmental Justice:** By working towards a net-zero future, we hope to contribute to global efforts to mitigate climate change, which disproportionately affects vulnerable and marginalised communities. Climate change can exacerbate social inequalities, and tackling it helps address environmental justice concerns.

- **Economic Opportunities:** The transition to a net-zero economy can create new jobs, industries, and investment opportunities. By supporting projects and initiatives that promote green technologies and low-carbon solutions, we hope to help create more economic opportunities for people from various backgrounds, including those from protected groups.

- **Skills Development and Training:** As the net-zero transition demands new skills and expertise, our commitment will involve promoting skills development and training programs in sustainable and green technologies. This work can provide individuals from protected groups with access to new career paths and employment opportunities, thereby contributing to advancing equality.

- **Inclusive Growth:** By supporting net-zero initiatives, we aim to contribute to more sustainable, inclusive growth in the South of Scotland. This means addressing social, economic, and environmental challenges in a way that benefits everyone, including individuals from protected groups.

- **Collaboration with Diverse Stakeholders**: Our work on net-zero initiatives involves collaborating with a variety of stakeholders, including businesses, communities, and organisations representing the interests of protected groups. This collaboration can help ensure that the transition to a net-zero economy is inclusive and addresses the needs of diverse communities.

- **Community Resilience:** Climate change can have adverse effects on local communities, particularly those with fewer resources to adapt. By promoting net-zero initiatives, we hope to support community resilience, enabling communities to better cope with the impacts of climate change, which in turn can advance equality.

2.2.2 Fair Work

- **Promoting Inclusive Work Environments:** Our commitment to Fair Work emphasises the importance of creating good quality, fair, and inclusive work environments. By encouraging employers to adopt inclusive practices, we help embed equality considerations in workplaces throughout the region.

- **Supporting Fair Pay:** By encouraging employers to pay the real Living Wage as a minimum to all employees, we support tackling income inequality issues that can disproportionately affect individuals from protected groups, thereby mainstreaming equality in terms of pay and working conditions.

- **Amplifying Employee Voices:** The Fair Work initiative emphasises giving employees opportunities to express their views and influence decision-making processes. By promoting employee engagement, we hope to amplify the needs and perspectives of individuals from protected groups.

- **Advocating for Flexible Working**: By promoting flexible working practices, we aim to support the needs of diverse individuals, including those from protected groups who may have specific requirements, such as parents, carers, or people with disabilities and/or health conditions. This approach helps mainstream equality by fostering more inclusive and adaptable workplaces.

- **Addressing the Gender Pay Gap**: Our work in supporting businesses to reduce the gender pay gap demonstrates our commitment to gender equality, contributing to mainstreaming equality in the workplace.

- **Collaborations and Partnerships:** By working with partners like Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to promote fair working practices, we will help ensure that equality considerations are integrated into business support activities across Scotland, further mainstreaming equality.

2.2.3 Digital

- **Access and Connectivity:** We are working to reduce the digital divide and promote equal opportunities for all residents, businesses, and communities in the region.

- **Skills Development:** Our work highlights the need for digital skills development to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to participate in the digital economy. By providing training, resources, and support for digital skills development, we aim to ensure that everyone can benefit from digital opportunities which in turn should reduce social and economic inequalities.

- **Inclusion:** We promote the design and delivery of digital services that are user-centric, accessible, and inclusive. By prioritising the needs of users with diverse abilities and backgrounds, we aim to ensure that digital services are more equitable and can be accessed by a wider range of people.

- **Supporting Diverse Businesses:** We aim to support businesses from diverse sectors and backgrounds in adopting digital technologies and practices. This support can help to level the playing field for businesses that may have been previously disadvantaged by limited access to digital resources or expertise.

- **Collaboration with Diverse Stakeholders:** We continuously emphasise the importance of collaborating with a wide range of stakeholders, including public, private, and third sector organisations, as well as local communities. By engaging diverse perspectives and working together to address common challenges, we hope to create more inclusive and equitable digital solutions.

2.2.4 Innovation:

- **Funding and Support:** Our funding and support is accessible to a diverse range of organisations. This helps level the playing field by providing financial support and guidance from various sectors, sizes, and backgrounds.

- **Encouraging Inclusive Innovation:** We emphasise the importance of inclusive innovation – ensuring that innovative solutions cater to the needs of diverse communities and individuals. By promoting products and services that are accessible, user-friendly, and designed with the end-user in mind, we hope to foster greater equality and social inclusion.

- **Collaboration and Partnerships:** We encourage collaboration between businesses, research institutions, public sector organisations, and local communities to foster innovation. By promoting the engagement of diverse stakeholders in the innovation process, we help ensure that different perspectives are considered, leading to more inclusive and equitable solutions.

- **Supporting Social Innovation:** We recognise the importance of social innovation in addressing societal challenges and promoting social inclusion. By supporting initiatives that aim to tackle social, environmental, or economic issues, we hope to help create a more equitable and inclusive society.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** We monitor and evaluate the impact of innovation support on different businesses and communities. By tracking outcomes and ensuring that resources are allocated fairly, we aim to promote greater equality and inclusion.

2.3 Governance

2.3.0 Our Board and our Executive Team play an integral role in establishing our vision for equality, as well as ensuring that we legally comply with the equality duties. Our governing body is clear on their role of putting robust systems in place to seek assurances that the legal requirements are being met so that we can demonstrate effectiveness and progress in mainstreaming.

2.3.1 Our Board has a key role in advancing gender equality in public life and meeting the duties set out in the Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018. The legislation sets a gender representation objective that 50% of non-executive Board members should be women. Our Board currently comprises 10 non-executive members, with women making up 50% of this group. We remain committed to maintaining and building on this level of representation.

2.3.2 Between May 2023 and March 2025, there was one Board appointment round. Of the three appointments made, two were women. We received 19 applications in total, 8 of whom were women. The final appointment in 2024 followed the early resignation of a Board member and was made from the previous year's applicant pool.

2.3.3 We have taken targeted steps to encourage applications from women and other under-represented groups. These included the development of a Board skills matrix to assess diversity needs and mitigate bias, tailored communications through partner networks, a dedicated recruitment webpage, and broader engagement activity. This work was supported by the Scottish Government Public Appointments Team.

2.3.4 We will continue to review and strengthen our approach to Board recruitment to support wider representation and maintain compliance with our statutory duties

2.4 Equality Impact Assessments

2.4.0 We integrate equality impact assessments with the Fairer Scotland Duty, ensuring a comprehensive and holistic assessment of policies, practices, and decisions, while identifying intersectional issues, promoting consistency and efficiency, and facilitating informed decision-making. This approach demonstrates our strong

commitment to fostering a more equitable society by considering the complex interplay between protected characteristics and socio-economic factors.

2.4.1 Our Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) process involves the following key steps:

- **Scoping:** We start by identifying the policies, practices, or decisions that need to undergo an IIA, considering their potential impact on people with protected characteristics, as defined by the Equality Act 2010.
- **Data Collection:** We gather relevant data and information to help us understand the potential effects of the policy, practice, or decision on different groups. This includes quantitative data, qualitative data, and any feedback from consultations with stakeholders and affected communities.
- **Analysis:** We carefully analyse the data to identify any potential positive or negative impacts on people with protected characteristics. We consider whether any negative impacts may amount to unlawful discrimination and whether there are opportunities to advance equality and foster good relations between different groups.
- **Mitigation and Enhancement:** If we identify any negative impacts, we develop and implement measures to mitigate or remove them. This may involve adjusting the policy, practice, or decision, or providing additional support to the affected groups. We also look for opportunities to enhance positive impacts and promote equality.
- **Consultation:** Throughout the IIA process, we engage with relevant stakeholders, including employees, service users, and communities, to gather their views and insights. We value their input in helping us understand the potential impacts and identifying appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures.
- **Monitoring and Review:** After implementing the policy, practice, or decision, we monitor its impact on equality and diversity over time. We review the IIA and update it as necessary to ensure that it continues to reflect the latest evidence and insights.
- **Reporting and Transparency:** We publish the results of our IIAs to demonstrate our commitment to equality and diversity and to promote transparency in our decision-making processes. We also use the findings to inform our broader equality and diversity strategies and action plans.

2.4.2 Further details of our progress in integrated impact assessments are included in Section 3.

2.5 Communications

2.5.0 We understand the importance of creating a culture of inclusivity where everyone feels valued and respected regardless of their background or identity. Therefore, we make sure that our communication materials, whether internal or external, are inclusive and accessible to everyone.

2.5.1 To demonstrate our commitment to promoting equality and diversity in our communication strategy, we have implemented a number of initiatives. For example, we ensure that our marketing campaigns feature diverse representation, including people from different ethnicities, genders, ages, and abilities. We also use gender-neutral language and avoid stereotypes in our messaging.

2.5.2 In addition, we have made it a priority to ensure that our communication channels are accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. We use plain language and provide alternative formats on request. We actively seek out and engage with diverse voices and perspectives to ensure that our communication strategy is representative of the communities we serve, including collaborating with our community partners.

2.5.3 We strive to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive community by leveraging the power of social media. We aim to promote our commitment to diversity by regularly creating and sharing engaging content that highlights various events, such as International Women's Day, and celebrating the contributions and accomplishments of diverse groups.

2.5.4 Our social media Policy aims to advance equality by embracing the use of social media as a tool for communication, engagement, and relationship-building with customers, colleagues, and stakeholders. The policy encourages positive and constructive discussions while ensuring compliance with legal responsibilities and minimising reputational risks. Employees are required to adhere to the organisation's policies and guidelines, maintain political neutrality, and act as ambassadors for SOSE's core values, projects, and services. The policy also ensures that the organisation adheres to Data Protection Policy and relevant legislation, helping to create a fair, transparent, and respectful online environment for all parties involved.

2.6 Human Resources and Organisational Development

2.6.0 Induction

We place a strong emphasis on promoting equality and diversity throughout each employee's journey with us – starting with attraction, recruitment and selection. During staff induction, we introduce our new team members to our comprehensive policies and practices that support diversity and foster an inclusive work environment.

2.6.1 Training and Development

We require all staff members to participate in mandatory diversity training, which is focused around lived experience. This training is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the value of diversity and the role each individual plays in fostering an inclusive work environment. Our sessions cover various topics, including unconscious bias, cultural awareness, communication styles, and practical strategies for promoting inclusivity. By requiring this training for all employees, we aim to create a shared understanding and reinforce our organisation's commitment to diversity and inclusion, ensuring that everyone is equipped to contribute positively to a workplace where all individuals feel respected, valued, and included.

2.6.2 Disability Confident

We are proud to have progressed to Level 2 of the Disability Confident scheme, which reflects our ongoing commitment to fostering an inclusive and accessible working environment for disabled people.

As a Disability Confident Employer, we have taken active steps to remove barriers and support disabled people through recruitment, employment, and progression. This includes offering accessible recruitment processes, guaranteeing interviews for disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria, and promoting flexible approaches to selection and employment.

We have embedded inclusive practices across the organisation by:

- Offering adjustments at every stage of the recruitment process, including alternative formats and tailored interviews
- Promoting our Disability Confident status in our job advertisements and on our website
- Encouraging applications through targeted outreach and diverse recruitment channels
- Conducting accessibility audits of our digital platforms and physical spaces
- Supporting disabled staff through mental health first aiders, occupational health provision, and flexible working trials, including a four-day working week pilot
- Providing equality and disability inclusion training to all staff

We also maintain a network of Equality Ambassadors across all teams and continue to review our progress annually, drawing on feedback from staff surveys and internal forums.

2.6.3 Code of Conduct

This policy supports the advancement of equality by promoting professional conduct, fairness, and inclusivity in all aspects of work. It is grounded in SOSE's organisational values — to be inclusive, responsible, bold, open-minded, and ambitious — and encourages diverse thinking and fair working practices. Employees are expected to maintain professional conduct, treat colleagues with dignity and respect, and adhere to the organisation's Dignity at Work Policy. Inappropriate behaviour may lead to disciplinary action, ensuring that equality is maintained within the organisation. Additionally, employees are required to maintain confidentiality, protecting both the organisation and its stakeholders. By fostering an inclusive, diverse, and respectful working environment, this policy supports the advancement of equality for all employees within SOSE.

2.6.4 Special Leave

This policy advances equality by providing a flexible, fair and people-centred range of special leave options that respond to a wide variety of needs and life circumstances. These include bereavement, parental loss, volunteering, caring responsibilities, fertility treatment, medical appointments, public duties, community involvement and career breaks. It recognises the importance of discretion and trust in managerial decision-making and encourages consistent and supportive application of the policy across teams.

The policy acknowledges a broad range of family and caring relationships, including kinship carers, and allows for paid and unpaid leave depending on individual circumstances. Clear routes are in place for employees to raise concerns, and HR support is promoted.

2.6.5 Sickness and Absence

This policy advances equality by promoting a supportive and inclusive working environment that prioritises employee health, safety and well-being. It encourages open communication and proactive engagement in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. The policy demonstrates a commitment to managing health-related situations fairly and supportively, considering each case individually and ensuring non-discrimination in the management of absence. By providing appropriate measures and support, such as wellbeing conversations, occupational health referrals, reasonable adjustments, return to work plans, and redeployment, the policy aims to help employees improve their attendance and contribute effectively to the organisation.

2.6.6 Family Leave Policy

This policy advances equality by providing support and provisions for employees with parental or caring responsibilities, ensuring they can effectively balance work and personal life. Covering various types of leave such as Maternity, Paternity, Adoption, Shared Parental Leave, Dependants' Leave, Carers' Leave, Fostering Leave, and Tax-Free Childcare, the policy outlines clear entitlements and procedures for employees. By offering paid leave for dependants and fostering, and unpaid parental leave, the policy acknowledges the diverse needs of employees with different family structures and situations. The policy's consideration for part-time employees ensures that all workers are accommodated, fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.

By providing clear guidelines for accessing leave and pay entitlements, the policy recognises the diverse needs of employees in different family structures and situations. Moreover, it acknowledges the importance of work-life balance, offering employees the opportunity to take time off during significant family events without being financially penalised.

2.6.7 Annual Leave Policy

This policy advances equality by promoting a healthy work-life balance, fostering a supportive and inclusive work environment, and ensuring fair access to holiday provisions for all employees. Additionally, provisions for carrying over unused holidays, addressing sickness during holidays, and managing leave during the notice period demonstrate a flexible and considerate approach to employee needs.

2.6.8 Grievance Policy

This policy advances equality by promoting a fair, quick, and consistent grievance resolution process for SOSE employees. It encourages a supportive and safe working environment, fostering trust, transparency and openness. By addressing employee concerns promptly and collaboratively, the policy supports diverse thinking, innovation, and the development of positive employment relationships. By treating all grievances equally, regardless of the employee's background or position, the policy contributes to a more inclusive and equitable workplace. Furthermore, the policy emphasises employee well-being and open communication, which helps maintain a healthy, diverse, and productive workforce.

As part of our preventative approach, 13 members of staff have recently been trained as internal mediators. This early intervention aims to resolve issues informally where possible, supporting positive working relationships and reducing the likelihood of formal grievances. It also reflects our commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful culture through open dialogue and mutual understanding.

2.6.9 Flexible Working

The flexible working policy advances equality by promoting a healthy work-life balance for employees, recognising the importance of personal and family life alongside professional responsibilities. By offering flexibility in working hours, scheduling meetings within a specific time frame, and discouraging email access outside of working hours, the policy reduces stress and fosters a supportive work environment. Additionally, the policy includes provisions for time off in lieu, informal flexibility, and formal flexible working requests such as job sharing, unpaid leave, compressed hours or part-time work. These options accommodate various personal circumstances and empower employees to manage their time more effectively.

Since October 2023, SOSE has been participating in a Scottish Government Working Group Pilot on flexible working. This has further strengthened opportunities to benefit from increased work-life balance and health outcomes, increased productivity and employee satisfaction levels.

2.6.10 Disciplinary Policy and Procedure

This policy advances equality by cultivating a fair, open, and understanding work environment that empowers employees to speak up when mistakes happen and emphasises informal problem resolution through good communication and collaboration. By recognising different degrees of seriousness in mistakes and addressing conduct issues fairly and promptly, the policy creates a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all stakeholders, fostering a more equal and respectful workplace.

2.6.11 Dignity at Work Policy

This policy advances equality and supports the elimination of discrimination by outlining the responsibilities of SOSE and its employees in preventing bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation in the workplace. It protects individuals who share protected characteristics and promotes inclusivity, diversity, and responsibility. The policy includes the organisation's legal duty under the Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, including by third parties. The policy encourages a positive and considerate work environment, emphasising the importance of treating others with dignity and respect. It provides a clear framework for raising concerns and addressing unacceptable behaviour, whether informally or formally, and offers mediation as a potential resolution method. By fostering a culture of understanding, respect, and open communication, this policy actively works towards creating an equitable and discrimination-free workplace.

2.6.12 Adverse Weather and Disruption to Public Transport Policy

This policy demonstrates due regard to the public sector equality duty by prioritising the health, safety, and well-being of all employees, regardless of their individual circumstances. It acknowledges the challenges that employees may face when attending work during adverse weather or public transport disruptions and ensures minimal disruption to services. The policy encourages employees to work from alternative locations or from home when necessary and emphasises the importance of following safety procedures while traveling. By allowing flexibility and understanding employees' unique situations, this policy promotes a fair and inclusive work environment.

2.6.13 Recruitment and Selection Policy

The policy demonstrates commitment to the public sector equality duty by promoting fairness, objectivity, and merit-based selection throughout the recruitment and deployment process. It emphasises equal opportunities, diverse employment types, accurate job descriptions, and rigorous selection processes. The policy also outlines steps to encourage applications from underrepresented groups, including targeted advertising in community media where appropriate. By adhering to these guidelines, the policy fosters an inclusive work environment that aligns with the principles of the public sector equality duty.

2.6.14 Relocation Policy

This advances equality by providing financial support to new and existing employees who need to move in order to take up a permanent post within the organisation. This policy is inclusive, as it applies to all employees who meet the eligibility criteria, ensuring that individuals from diverse backgrounds can take advantage of career opportunities within SOSE. By offering relocation assistance, the organisation removes potential barriers for employees who might otherwise be unable to accept a position due to the financial burden of relocating. This support helps create a more diverse and inclusive workforce, ultimately contributing to a more equal and fair workplace environment.

2.6.15 Assignment Policy

This promotes cross-functional working and providing all employees with equal access to opportunities within the organisation. This policy encourages staff to broaden their skills, manage their careers, and contribute to the success of the organisation. By allowing for short-term, flexible assignments without formal approval procedures, the policy ensures that diverse talents can be utilised effectively across different areas of the organisation. Advertising assignment opportunities internally further promotes equal access and fair selection processes based on skills, abilities, and availability. The policy supports the development of a diverse and inclusive workforce, advancing the organisation's commitment to equality.

2.6.16 Probationary Policy

This probationary period policy pays due regard to the public sector equality duty by providing a clear and structured process for managers to support and assess the performance of new employees. The policy ensures equal treatment and opportunities for all employees regardless of their background or personal circumstances. With a series of structured meetings, informal check-ins, and performance reviews, the policy encourages open communication and dialogue, enabling employees to receive the necessary support to succeed in their roles. Additionally, the policy accounts for potential underlying medical conditions or disabilities that may affect an employee's performance, ensuring that appropriate support and accommodations are provided.

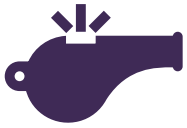
2.6.17 Performance Improvement Policy and Procedure

This policy demonstrates its commitment to the public sector equality duty by providing clear guidelines for staff and management to support and enhance the performance of all employees. It emphasises understanding employee motivation, setting clear and concise goals using the SMART framework, and promoting continuous feedback through both informal and formal channels. Employees are encouraged to disclose any health conditions or disabilities that may impact performance, with appropriate support, occupational health referrals, and reasonable adjustments considered throughout. In situations where performance improvements are not achieved, the policy outlines a fair and consistent formal performance improvement process, which involves collaboration with HR and is determined on a case-by-case basis. By fostering a supportive and inclusive environment that promotes employee engagement and morale, this policy seeks to ensure that all employees have equal opportunities for growth and development within the organisation.

2.6.18 Pay and Reward Policy

This policy aims to establish a transparent, objective, and bias-free pay and reward system at SOSE to reduce any equal pay gaps and attract skilled and committed employees. The policy outlines the organisation's approach to pay grades, job evaluation, pay progression, recruitment, promotions, responsibility allowances, market supplements, and employee benefits. SOSE's job evaluation scheme is designed to ensure equal pay for equal work, with roles assessed against a standard set of criteria and salaries linked to job content, not individuals. SOSE regularly reviews its pay practices in line with the Scottish Government's public sector pay policy, monitors the impact of these practices, and engages with employees and trade unions to ensure compliance with equal pay practices and avoid discrimination in its pay and reward systems.

2.6.19 Whistleblowing



This policy aims to establish guidelines for SOSE employees to safely raise concerns about misconduct, wrongdoing, or fraud within the organisation without fear of reprisal or discrimination. The policy also safeguards employees who raise genuine concerns from victimisation and ensures confidentiality, providing additional support through HR, trade union representatives, and external organisations like the Employee Assistance Programme and Safecall.

2.6.20 Employee Volunteering Policy

This policy demonstrates due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty by promoting SOSE's commitment to an active role in the communities it serves and supporting employee volunteering during working hours. It aligns with the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, emphasising environmental, social, and local community benefits. The policy ensures that employees can request up to 21 hours of paid volunteering leave per year (pro-rata for part-time employees) and outlines the principles, eligibility criteria and the digital application process via the People Portal. By allowing employees to engage in voluntary work, the policy fosters skill development and personal wellbeing, while benefiting the wider community and contributing to the region's economic, social, and environmental development.

2.6.21 Redundancy Policy

The policy on redundancy management pays due regard to the public sector equality duty by ensuring fair, consistent, objective, and non-discriminatory selection and exploring measures to avoid or minimise redundancies, such as redeployment, retraining, and voluntary severance. The policy also provides support for affected employees, such as outplacement counselling and time off for job seeking.

2.7 Procurement

2.7.0 We are committed to advancing equality in procurement by actively incorporating and promoting equal opportunities throughout our procurement processes. We recognise the importance of engaging with diverse suppliers and ensuring that our procurement activities reflect our commitment to fostering an inclusive and equitable environment.

To achieve this, we:

- Embed our equality principles into procurement policies and guidelines, ensuring that they align with both national and international standards and legislations.
- Encourage potential suppliers to share their equality and diversity policies and practices, which we consider as part of the tender evaluation process.

- Require suppliers to demonstrate their commitment to advancing equality through their employment practices, workplace policies, and supply chain management.
- Provide training and guidance to our procurement staff to raise awareness of equality issues, recognise potential barriers, and promote inclusive practices throughout the procurement lifecycle.
- Monitor and evaluate our procurement activities to ensure that they continue to advance equality, share best practices, and address any areas for improvement.

2.7.1 By integrating these principles into our procurement processes, we aim to create a fair and inclusive environment that supports diverse suppliers and drives positive change for our communities.

3. Impact Assessments

3.0 Progress on Integrated Impact Assessments

3.0.0 During this reporting period, we completed 25 integrated impact assessments across a wide range of organisational activities. These assessments are central to compliance, but more importantly, they are embedded in how we design policies, deliver funding, and shape our internal culture. Each assessment supports us in identifying inequalities, eliminating discrimination, and actively advancing equality of opportunity and inclusive outcomes. We have produced a summary table of findings - see Appendix 1.

3.0.1 The breadth of the assessments reflects the scope of our responsibilities — from internal workforce policies and HR frameworks to strategic funding programmes and innovation initiatives. All assessments considered both protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and the potential for differential outcomes related to socio-economic disadvantage. In many cases, this dual consideration led to practical changes in design, implementation, or delivery.

3.1 Embedding Inclusion in Organisational Practice

3.1.0 A significant number of assessments focused on our internal HR policy refresh programme. These policies were re-developed to reflect SOSE's values and culture and include new or revised guidance on flexible working, special leave, probation, pay and reward, family leave, performance improvement, and whistleblowing. The assessments helped to ensure that each policy not only avoided discriminatory effects but actively supported inclusion, fairness, and wellbeing.

3.1.1 For example:

- The Flexible Working Policy explicitly considered the needs of carers, disabled people, and those experiencing stress or burnout, and embedded informal flexibility into day-to-day practice.
- The Pay, Equal Pay & Reward Policy was reviewed to ensure alignment with equal pay principles and transparency across grades, with specific attention to addressing any emerging pay disparities.
- The Probation and Performance Policies were shaped to ensure that capability processes are applied fairly and account for individual circumstances, including the impact of health conditions or neurodivergence.

- The assessments also prompted clearer documentation, strengthened monitoring routes, and the provision of manager training to ensure consistent application. Across these internal policies, engagement activities included consultation with trade unions, use of staff survey data, internal workshops, and the involvement of external HR specialists to support inclusive policy design.

3.2 Strengthening Equity in Service Delivery and External Programmes

3.2.0 A smaller but equally important group of assessments focused on externally facing programmes, particularly funding and innovation initiatives. These included the Community Ambition Fund, CreaTech Fund, Loan Fund, Natural Capital Innovation Fund, and the Cycling Infrastructure Fund.

3.2.1 These assessments explored:

- Accessibility of funding information and application processes
- The design of appraisal and decision-making frameworks
- How funded activity could support inclusive economic outcomes and fair work
- Whether initiatives aligned with SOSE's commitment to Net Zero, community wealth building, and reducing inequalities in rural areas

3.2.2 To support these assessments, SOSE engaged with community organisations, partner agencies, and used insights from Business Panel Surveys, local engagement events, and roadshows. This helped to ensure that funds were both well targeted and accessible. For example, the Loan Fund introduced a streamlined expression of interest form, with support options available for applicants who might face digital or other barriers.

3.2.3 Where necessary, changes were made to marketing materials, eligibility guidance, and appraisal criteria to improve transparency and accessibility. In the case of the Natural Capital Innovation Fund, the assessment informed the decision to embed equality training for assessors and to incorporate inclusive recruitment conditions into the funding agreements.

3.3 Key Themes and Organisational Learning

3.3.0 Several cross-cutting themes emerged from the body of assessments:

- **Embedding human-centred design:** Assessments supported SOSE's shift to human-centred, values-led policies. This has helped promote fairness, clarity, and accessibility, especially in policies that directly affect employment terms and conditions.

- **Intersectionality and hidden disadvantage:** Many assessments flagged the need to better understand how protected characteristics intersect with socio-economic inequality. While some policies explicitly addressed these intersections (e.g. flexible working and mental health), others highlighted data gaps that will be addressed through improved monitoring and evaluation.
- **Accessible communication and participation:** Several assessments led to direct changes in how we communicate — ensuring that policies, funding calls, and internal procedures are available in accessible formats and written in plain language.
- **Support for implementation:** Many assessments identified the importance of training, HR support, and ongoing monitoring to ensure policies are implemented fairly. This led to new mechanisms such as checklists, manager toolkits, and consistent documentation through Clear Review.
- **Demonstrating lived experience:** In developing HR policies, SOSE engaged with employees to draw on lived experience. This included discussions around bereavement, menopause, disability, and caring responsibilities — insights that shaped the tone and scope of entitlements in policies like Special Leave and Absence & Wellbeing.

3.4 Next Steps

3.4.0 We are committed to improving the quality and consistency of impact assessments across all areas of activity. Over the next period, we will:

- Provide further training and guidance for staff completing assessments
- Strengthen our approach to data and evidence-gathering, particularly around socio-economic disadvantage
- Embed routine equality checks into programme design, monitoring, and evaluation cycles
- Share good practice internally to support continuous improvement

3.4.1 Our approach to equality impact assessment is not static. It is a process of reflection, engagement, and adaptation — and one that helps us deliver better, fairer outcomes for our workforce, partners, and communities.

4. Staff Data

4.0 Gathering and Using Information

4.0.0 We ask all our staff to disclose equality data regarding all of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act. In common with other public sector organisations, we find that we have varying rates of disclosure and reliability of information depending on particular protected characteristic. For example, the information which we gather on age, sex and race is more reliable than the information we gather on protected characteristics which are perceived as being sensitive or confidential, such as sexual orientation.

4.0.1 Our specific obligations in terms of the legislation are to take steps to gather information on composition, recruitment, progression and retention of staff with reference to each of the protected characteristics. The legislation also requires us to state how we use this information to better perform the equality duty. We have a range of processes to ensure that the information is used for this purpose. The information is collected in a data dashboard and regularly reviewed by our HR staff and Senior Management Team. We investigate circumstances and act when the information indicates evidence of disproportionality, or when SOSE staff indicators are inconsistent with external indicators. We also use this information to inform a quantitative analysis of the equality impact of our practices, processes and policies.

4.0.2 Where the number of staff with a protected characteristic is fewer than ten, and the information is sensitive or personal, we have not specified the number to avoid individuals being identified.

4.0.3 The SOSE diversity data dashboard in attached at Appendix 2.

4.1 Data on Each Protected Characteristic

4.1.0 Age

In 2025, the distribution of employees across age groups has shifted slightly compared to the 2023 data. The 41–45 age group maintains its position as the largest age band, consistent with 2023 when this group made up 21.09% of the workforce. However, there is now an increase in employees aged 55 and over, who account for 35 staff members, reflecting a more mature workforce profile than previously reported.

The data shows a relatively even distribution between age groups 31–65, with smaller numbers in the under-30 category.

Gender analysis shows that the average age is similar for both males (45.7 years) and females (45.9 years), indicating that age distribution is fairly equal between genders.

4.1.1 Disability

In 2025, 2.1% of SOSE staff have declared a disability, with a further 2.8% preferring not to say, and 22.8% not supplying any information. This marks a slight decrease in the declared rate from 3.5% in 2023. While small fluctuations are expected year on year, the overall level of non-disclosure remains high at over 25%.

This suggests that the true rate of disability or long-term health conditions may be underreported. In comparison, Scottish Government estimates suggest that approximately 10% of the economically active population have a long-term activity-limiting health problem.

4.1.2 Gender Reassignment

No employees or applicants have declared that they have undergone or intend to undergo the process of gender reassignment.

4.1.3 Pregnancy or Maternity

The number of employees who have declared that they were pregnant and/or have taken maternity leave is not being declared as it is less than 10. In the reporting period, all staff who took maternity leave and who were scheduled to return to work within the reporting period, have returned to work.

4.1.4 Race

The majority of SOSE staff identify as White – Scottish (53.8%), followed by White – Other British (20.0%), and White – other white ethnic group (3.4%). A small number identify as White – Irish (2.1%) or Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups (0.7%). However, 20.0% of staff have not supplied their ethnicity, which limits the organisation's ability to fully understand the ethnic profile of the workforce.

While SOSE serves a region with relatively low ethnic diversity compared to national averages, it remains important that we monitor representation, ensure inclusion, and create conditions where people feel safe to disclose their ethnicity. The current level of non-disclosure is similar to that seen in disability reporting and suggests a broader need to build confidence in how we collect and use equality data.

4.1.5 Religion or Belief

22.1% of SOSE staff have declared a Christian affiliation, comprising Church of Scotland (16.6%), Roman Catholic (1.4%) and Other Christian (4.1%). The proportion of staff reporting no religion or belief has increased slightly to 48.3%, up from 46.9% in the previous reporting period.

4.1.6 Sex

SOSE's workforce comprises 91 women (62.8%) and 54 men (37.2%), showing a near-identical gender profile to 2023, when 61.5% of staff were female. The distribution of gender across directorates varies, with the highest concentration of female staff in the Place and Enterprise directorate (39 women, 27% of total workforce). Women also make up the majority in Finance and Corporate Resources (22 women) and in Net Zero, Nature and Entrepreneurship (16 women).

4.1.7 Sexual Orientation

73.1% of SOSE staff have declared that they are heterosexual or straight. A further 3.4% have preferred not to say, and 22.1% have not supplied this information. The proportion of staff who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual remains low, with 0.7% identifying as gay or lesbian and 0.7% as bisexual. This gives a combined total of 1.4%, a slight decrease from the previously reported figure of 1.5%.

4.2 Recruitment and Selection

4.2.0 Age

Candidates came from a wide range of age groups, with the largest share of applicants (28.6%) aged 45–54, followed by those aged 35–44 (23.9%) and 25–34 (20.5%). Representation of the youngest (under 25) and oldest (65+) age groups was low.

The 45–54 group increased its share at interview stage (32.3%) and made up 40% of all hires. Other appointments came from the 35–44 (20%), 25–34 (20%) and 55–64 (13.3%) brackets. This pattern suggests that mid-career candidates were most likely to progress, potentially reflecting the experience requirements of the roles.

4.2.1 Disability

The proportion of applicants identifying as disabled was lower than the regional census benchmark of 12.8%. Just under 6% of applicants disclosed a disability, and this figure reduced slightly at each recruitment stage. While small in number, disabled applicants were present at every stage from application to appointment. A small proportion of applicants—between 4% and 6%—chose not to answer or preferred not to say, which is a common feature of self-reported equalities data.

The data indicates that disabled applicants were less likely to apply than would be expected based on local population figures. This may reflect wider trends in labour market participation, the definition of disability used on application forms, or personal choice around disclosure. Nonetheless, those who did apply progressed through the recruitment stages at broadly comparable rates to their peers. The drop from 5.6% at application to 2.2% at appointment should be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size.

4.2.2 Race

4.2.3 Applicants from ethnic minority backgrounds were represented at higher levels than the local population benchmark, particularly those identifying as Asian or African. For example, Asian applicants made up over 5% of applications compared to under 1% expected regionally. However, this diversity was less apparent at later stages of the process, with a decline in representation by the time of appointment. The proportion of applicants identifying as White – Scottish was consistently lower than the local population, while other White groups (e.g. White – Other British and White – Irish) were proportionally closer to expectations.

4.2.4 Religion or Belief

Applicants identifying as having no religion made up the majority at every stage of the recruitment process, exceeding regional expectations. In contrast, those affiliated with the Church of Scotland were underrepresented throughout, with less than half the expected proportion applying. Minority religious groups—including Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Pagan, and Jewish—were more strongly represented among applicants than in the local population, and this pattern remained relatively stable through to appointment. These trends suggest that the organisation is attracting applications from individuals with a wide range of beliefs.

4.2.5 Sex

Female applicants made up just over half of all applications (53.5%) and their representation increased slightly at each stage, culminating in 60.9% of appointments. Male applicants, who accounted for 43.5% of applications, made up 32.6% of those appointed. Conversion rates from application to appointment were 9.2% for women and 6.0% for men. A small number of applicants either did not disclose their gender or identified "in another way".

Women made up a slightly higher proportion of applicants and appointments than expected based on the regional population, suggesting strong engagement with the recruitment process. However, this may partly reflect occupational segregation, where the types of roles advertised attract more women than men. Further monitoring by job type would help to understand these patterns more fully.

4.2.6 Sexual Orientation

Applicants identifying as gay, lesbian or bisexual were slightly overrepresented compared to the regional population, particularly at the application stage, while those choosing not to disclose were notably fewer than expected. This suggests a degree of confidence among applicants in sharing this information, which may reflect positively on the organisation's inclusive culture. Representation remained broadly stable through to appointment, though numbers were small, and continued monitoring will help to ensure fair outcomes for all groups over time.

5. Gender Pay Report

5.0 Equal Pay Gap

5.0.0 The mean pay gap at SOSE is 9.3% in favour of men, which is a slight improvement since last reported. The SOSE gap is very similar to the national pay gap of 9.1%.

5.0.1 An analysis of gender by grade highlights some evidence of occupational segregation. Female employees are well represented at grades SOSE-C to SOSE-G, with particularly high numbers at SOSE-G (12 women to 6 men). Women are less well represented (at SOSE Grade H, where male staff outnumber female colleagues, however, there are only 4 members of staff at this level of seniority. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the organisation's most senior post (CEO) is occupied by a female. Conversely, women dominate at grades SOSE-D and below.

5.0.2 This distribution helps to explain the gender pay gap: while overall representation is strong, the concentration of male employees in higher pay bands and females in lower pay bands contributes to the pay differential. There is no evidence of direct pay inequality for equal work, as roles within grades are paid consistently, but structural patterns in role type and grade level remain.

5.0.3 The SOSE pay gap is deemed significant as it exceeds 5%. The reasons for pay gaps are complex and interrelated. Women can experience greater difficulties than men when it comes to balancing work and private life. The task of looking after dependent family members is largely borne by women, and far more women than men choose to take parental leave. Consequently, women have more career interruptions or work shorter hours than men. This has a negative impact on their career development and promotion prospects. It can also mean less financially rewarding careers.

5.1 Advancing Equality in Pay

5.1.0 We will continue with our work to address the gender pay gap by:

- **Encouraging flexible working:** Many women are forced to reduce their hours or leave the workforce altogether due to caring responsibilities. By offering flexible working arrangements, we can help women balance work and caring responsibilities, and support them to progress in their careers.
- **Providing training and development opportunities**: Investing in training and development opportunities for female employees can help address the gender pay gap by providing them with the skills and experience they need to progress into more senior roles.

- **Addressing unconscious bias:** Unconscious bias can often lead to women being overlooked for promotion or paid less than their male counterparts. We aim to address this by providing training to help staff recognise and address their biases, and by ensuring that recruitment and promotion processes are designed to be as objective as possible.

5.2 Equal Pay Policy

5.2.0 South of Scotland Enterprise is an equal opportunities employer and is committed to ensuring that all employees are treated equally irrespective of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

5.2.1 SOSE recognises 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 continue to work with our recognised trade unions to take action to promote and implement equal pay. SOSE 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 equal pay gap.

5.2.2 To support the commitments under this policy, SOSE will:

- review existing and future pay practices for all employees to ensure that they are objective and comply with best equal pay practice.
- carry out regular monitoring of the impact of these practices.
- inform employees of how these practices work and how their pay is arrived at.
- inform, consult and where appropriate negotiate with our recognised trade unions on progress against these actions.

5.2.3 Through this action, South of Scotland Enterprise will work to avoid unfair discrimination in its pay and reward system and reward fairly the skills, experience and potential of all employees.

6. Equality Outcomes - Progress

6.0 Outcome 1:

We support the development of a more inclusive, diverse and thriving regional community that benefits from a wide range of perspectives and experiences.

We have made clear progress in embedding inclusion and diversity into how we engage with, support, and serve communities across the South of Scotland. Our work has focused on amplifying underrepresented voices, improving accessibility, and co-designing solutions that reflect lived experience.

In October 2023, we launched the SOSE Youth Advisory Forum, a collective of young individuals dedicated to influencing decision-making across the region and ensuring their voices are actively heard. In recognition of their commitment and insights, members receive tailored training, mentoring, and development opportunities, providing them with a robust foundation to build their future careers and influence.

We have supported the development of the Neurodivergent Entrepreneurs Network (NEN), a pilot programme co-designed with neurodivergent people to support local entrepreneurial activity. The pilot provides peer coaching and delivers the "We Speak Tangent" podcast, which highlights the experiences of neurodivergent entrepreneurs in the region. This initiative has helped create a sense of community and raised awareness of the barriers faced by some of the people we work with.

Our integrated impact assessments have influenced the design of inclusive projects. For example, in our work to establish an Adventure Bike Park in the Tweed Valley, we convened a working group of people with a wide range of lived experience, including disabled riders, mental health advocates, and equality practitioners. As a result of this process, we shifted from planning a single accessible trail to designing every trail to be inclusive. This approach has been described by partners as transformative, and has informed how we embed equality into other capital investments.

We have made sustained efforts to improve how we communicate and connect. Our campaigns for Autism Awareness Week, Mental Health Awareness Week and Neurodiversity Celebration Week have centred around the voices of colleagues and community members. These included personal stories, video content, top tips for inclusive communication, and practical advice from colleagues with lived experience. During Autism Awareness Week, we shared daily video content and insights from individuals including parents, comedians and colleagues across SOSE. During Neurodiversity Celebration Week, we hosted an all-staff call featuring colleagues sharing their own stories and experiences of ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia.

We have also celebrated different routes into employment through our support for the #NoWrongPath campaign and accompanying podcast content. These stories highlighted the diverse backgrounds of our staff and helped show that success is not limited to a single pathway. This work was well received on social media and used internally to support mentoring and awareness-raising.

We continue to build in accessibility from the outset. We created internal guidance for accessible event planning and carried out a specialist-led accessibility review of our recruitment platform, which led to changes to layout, labelling, and compatibility with screen readers. We now offer job adverts in alternative formats and have embedded a dedicated contact for adjustments.

Our due diligence and funding assessments also reflect our commitment to equity and inclusion. We have carried out integrated equality and Fairer Scotland Duty impact assessments for the Community Ambition Fund, CreaTech Fund and Natural Capital Innovation Fund. These assessments led to simplified application processes, improvements in language and structure, and the use of inclusive scoring frameworks.

Our partnership working is key to our approach. We continue to work with groups such as CEMVO, Think Differently, and Sleeping Giants to help shape our strategic thinking and bring fresh insight into our programmes. These collaborations have informed both internal culture and external delivery.

We know that inclusion is an ongoing process and not a destination. Looking ahead, we will continue to strengthen feedback loops, diversify our engagement channels, and invest in the capacity of communities to participate in decision-making. Our aim is to ensure that every community member sees themselves reflected in the decisions we make, and has the opportunity to shape the future of the South of Scotland.

6.1 Outcome 2

Our promotion of Fair Work leads to a more equitable, inclusive and fair work environment across the region, leading to a reduction in inequality and enhanced local enterprise.

We continue to embed Fair Work as a central theme in our role as an employer, funder, and regional enterprise agency. Our work in this area supports inclusive growth, promotes equity in the labour market, and strengthens the social foundations of local enterprise. We have built Fair Work principles into our funding frameworks, policy development, and our work with partners across the public, private and third sectors.

We launched our Fair Work Toolkit to help grant applicants and partners understand what good practice looks like. This resource includes practical guidance on flexible working, inclusive recruitment, fair pay, and employee voice. It has been widely used across our funding portfolio, including within the Community Ambition Fund, Natural Capital Innovation Fund, and other place-based investments.

We delivered a suite of targeted support and learning opportunities to build regional capability on fair and inclusive employment. This included dedicated employer workshops on creating fairer workplaces for neurodivergent people, run in partnership with Sleeping Giants and NHS Dumfries and Galloway. These sessions were based on research conducted with neurodivergent adults, and explored how to reduce barriers to recruitment and retention through inclusive adjustments and design. We also supported the development of new neuroinclusive employer tools and approaches, which will be piloted in the next reporting period.

As part of our commitment to peer learning, we drove the creation of the Scottish Borders Living Wage Trail, which helps highlight good practice on fair pay and encourages more employers to consider Living Wage accreditation. Our work also featured in the CEMVO "Race for Human Rights" programme, through which we shared our approach to embedding race equality and human rights into economic development and organisational planning.

We provided tailored support for entrepreneurs and small businesses through the Pathways pilot, a Scottish Government-funded programme delivered by SOSE. Pathways supported 269 individuals into exploring self-employment, including people facing barriers due to socio-economic disadvantage, mental health, or other protected characteristics. Coaches provided one-to-one support, helping participants build confidence and make informed decisions about whether to pursue business start-up. Small grants (provided to 391 individuals) supported practical next steps such as purchasing equipment or accessing training. This model reflects our belief that fair work begins with fair access to opportunity, and the feedback from participants has been overwhelmingly positive.

We also used our funding and procurement processes to promote fair work at the point of award. For example, during the appointment of an operator for the Adventure Bike Park, we included accessibility and inclusion as core criteria in the tender process. This led to proposals that embedded inclusive design, supported participation from underrepresented groups, and demonstrated a clear commitment to social benefit as part of the commercial offer.

6.2 Outcome 3

Our transition to net zero is just and inclusive, creating opportunities for people with protected characteristics.

We have embedded the principles of a just transition into our net zero work, ensuring that people with protected characteristics are considered, consulted, and supported as we help shape a greener and more inclusive regional economy. We are committed to ensuring that the benefits of the transition are equitably distributed, and that no group is left behind as we invest in low-carbon opportunities.

We have taken active steps to integrate inclusion into programme design and delivery. The Natural Capital Innovation Fund is one example where we carried out an integrated equality and Fairer Scotland Duty impact assessment before launch. This ensured that the fund was not only focused on environmental benefit but also on widening access to opportunity and supporting

inclusive growth. Through targeted outreach and flexible funding arrangements, the fund has helped to create inclusive pathways into the green economy.

Our capital projects have been shaped by inclusive design principles. The Adventure Bike Park in the Tweed Valley is a case in point. We used the early-stage impact assessment process to co-design accessibility requirements in partnership with disabled riders and inclusion experts. The resulting project proposal includes accessible trails, inclusive facilities, and a charitable element to support participation by underrepresented groups. We see this as a model for future green investments — where physical and socio-economic accessibility are central from the outset.

We have also invested in increasing workforce readiness for the green economy. Through our wider support for enterprise and skills development, including the Pathways programme, we have helped people from underrepresented backgrounds explore sustainable entrepreneurship. We have supported pilot initiatives such as the ASN Learning Network and partnered with organisations such as CEMVO, Sleeping Giants and Think Differently to shape inclusive approaches to economic participation.

We are proud to have achieved Gold accreditation as a Carbon Literate Organisation. More than 77% of our staff are now carbon literate, and we are working with regional partners to create a consortium that will make inclusive carbon literacy training more widely available across the South of Scotland. This includes plans to deliver tailored content to community groups, businesses and individuals who may face barriers to participating in the green transition.

We recognise that access to information is essential. In line with our accessibility commitments, we have made materials available in alternative formats and worked to improve the usability of our online presence. We continue to explore how we can better communicate the opportunities and implications of net zero in ways that resonate across communities.

We are also working to influence inclusive practice across the wider regional ecosystem. Our funding guidance, impact assessments and procurement processes encourage applicants to consider how their projects will contribute to a just transition. We will continue to build on this approach in the next reporting period, working with partners to develop shared frameworks for inclusive sustainability.

6.3 Outcome 4

We will be a leader in fostering an inclusive, diverse and equitable work environment, where staff and board members reflect the communities we serve.

We continue to make deliberate and sustained progress towards becoming a leading inclusive employer. Across our workforce and governance structures, we are focused on representation, inclusive culture, capability building, and continuous improvement — ensuring that our people practices align with our values and statutory duties.

Our workforce data shows that we maintain a strong gender balance across the organisation, with women making up over 60% of employees. We also continue to exceed the target of 50%

female representation on our Board. During the most recent recruitment rounds for non-executive Board members, we appointed two women from a total of three vacancies, following inclusive outreach and the use of a Board skills matrix to address underrepresentation. We promoted the roles via our partner networks, targeting women, disabled people, LGBTQ+ communities and people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds.

Internally, we have made significant investments in creating a culture where everyone feels valued and supported. We are now a Level 2 Disability Confident Employer, with a strong foundation of accessible practice in recruitment, onboarding and day-to-day support. Our Disability Confident self-assessment reflects our ongoing work to offer flexible recruitment processes, reasonable adjustments, and proactive workplace accommodations. We have advertised our Disability Confident status on our careers site, included it in job advertisements, and offered interview guarantees to disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria.

We achieved a Silver award in the Neurodiversity Employers Index, with over 35% of staff contributing to our self-assessment. This process led to a practical action plan to improve onboarding, communication, and manager capability. We continue to provide targeted support to neurodivergent staff and are trialling inclusive design approaches across policies and internal systems.

We have created a network of Equality Ambassadors across teams to provide localised support and run regular campaigns to raise awareness of lived experience and good practice. Our celebration of Neurodiversity Celebration Week and Autism Awareness Week has included all-staff calls, shared stories from colleagues, practical communication tips, and myth-busting resources. We have also issued practical guidance on inclusive communication, accessible meeting design, and inclusive digital tools.

We have reviewed and refreshed more than 20 internal policies using an equality-by-design approach, supported by integrated impact assessments and staff engagement. New or updated policies include our Code of Conduct, Flexible Working, Family Leave, Performance Improvement, Probation, Dignity at Work and Special Leave. In each case, inclusive language, accessibility, and equity were core considerations.

Mental health and wellbeing continue to be a priority. We have trained a network of Mental Health First Aiders, maintained our Employee Assistance Programme, and delivered staff campaigns such as Mental Health Awareness Week, which included daily tips, wellbeing challenges and promotion of available support. We also continue to trial and evaluate our flexible working pilot to explore the impact of flexibility on wellbeing and productivity.

We actively promote inclusive language and visibility, including guidance on adding pronouns to email signatures and MS Teams profiles, and provide resources and training at induction and throughout the employee lifecycle. Our internal communications regularly highlight inclusive practices, offer tools for self-reflection, and encourage staff to share experiences that shape how we evolve.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we have completed 25 integrated Equality and Fairer Scotland Duty impact assessments across policies, programmes and

projects. These assessments have helped ensure that our internal culture reflects the same values we promote externally and has led to meaningful adjustments to process and policy.

We continue to monitor our diversity data and will be refreshing our internal action plan for workforce equality in 2025. We are committed to maintaining transparency, acting on staff feedback, and building a workplace where everyone can thrive — regardless of background, identity or role. By modelling inclusive practice internally, we are better placed to influence the region and deliver our wider mission.

Seonaid Mann
28th April 2025

7. Board Diversity

Reporting Period: 1 May 2023 to 30 March 2025

7.0 Background

7.0.0 The Gender Representation on Public Boards (Scotland) Act 2018 is intended to help address the historic and persistent under representation of women in public life and it requires public authorities to publish a report on the carrying out of their functions under Sections 5 and Section 6 of the Act:

- **Section 5 –** requires public authorities to take such steps as they consider appropriate to encourage applications by women.
- **Section 6 –** sets out a duty to take steps towards achieving the gender representation objective by 31 December 2022.

7.0.1 The Act sets a gender representative objective that a Board has 50% of non-executive members who are women. If a Board has an odd number of non-executive members, the objective applies as if the Board has one fewer non-executive member. If a Board has 12 non-executive members, the objective is that the Board should have 6 non-executive members who are women.

7.1 South of Scotland Enterprise Board

7.1.0 The SOSE Board has 10 non-executive members, plus the Chair and Chief Executive.

7.1.1 SOSE has met the 50% female representation objective on our non- executive Board since SOSE was formed on 1st April 2020.

7.2 Appointments in the Period

7.2.0 During the period May 2023 to March 2025 there were two appointment rounds. One for two members in 2023 and one for one member in 2024. Both rounds successfully appointed the three vacancies, two of which were women. Details on applications are provided below.

Appointment Round 1 – 2023/24

Number of vacancies	Number of applications received	Number of Women applied	Number of Women appointed
2	19	8	1

Appointment Round 2 – 2024 *

Number of vacancies	Number of applications received	Number of Women applied	Number of Women appointed
1	19	8	1

* One Board member resigned early in 2024. The replacement was selected from the previous round of applications in 2023/24 (Appointment Exercise 1). There was no advertising for this appointment.

7.3 Appointment Process

7.3.0 The Board appointments process encouraged applications from women and other under-represented protected characteristics. The approach included:

- Development of a Board skills matrix to ensure the Board's skills and diversity requirements were fully considered and to test the language used to address any unconscious bias
- Targeted communications via our partner networks and social media platforms to encourage applications from women, disabled people, LGBTQ+ people, people from ethnic minority communities and those aged under 50.
- Using broader engagement activity to highlight the Board opportunities
- Creation of a dedicated Board recruitment webpage on our website.

7.3.1 SOSE was supported during the appointment processes by the Scottish Government Public Appointments Team.

7.4 Summary

7.4.0 Our Board currently has more than 50% female representation and we aim to sustain this position as we look to future Board appointment rounds.

7.4.1 We will aim to build on the activity to attract applications from women to ensure that we continue to meet the gender representation objective.

8. Appendices

8.0 Appendix 1: Impact Assessment Summary Findings

Title	Key Equality Impacts	FSD Consideration	Engagement
Flexible Working Week Pilot	Flexibility supports carers, disabled people, and mental wellbeing.	Improves work-life balance; potential positive impact for low-income staff.	Internal staff engagement and pilot evaluation.
Community Ambition Fund	Access considered for underrepresented groups and rural communities.	Aims to reduce regional inequalities and support community wealth building.	Community tours, local partnerships.
CreaTech Fund	Creative sector inclusivity addressed; youth engagement considered.	Targeted at start-ups and disadvantaged areas.	Applicant feedback, equality appraisal during fund design.
Cycle Infrastructure Fund	Improves active travel access, especially for rural and low-income communities.	Enhances connectivity in deprived areas.	Consultation with transport and equality stakeholders.
Website Restructure Project	Improves accessibility for disabled users and mobile device access.	Supports digital inclusion.	User testing, accessibility audit.
Safeguarding Policy	Focus on protecting vulnerable groups and staff with care responsibilities.	Supports safe access to services.	Policy consultation with safeguarding leads.
Family Leave Policy	Supports different family structures, carers, and parental rights.	Improves support for low-income families.	Trade union input, HR consultation.
Flexible Working Policy	Promotes inclusive flexibility; supports disabled people and carers.	Supports work-life balance for those facing socio-economic barriers.	Staff surveys, SLT discussions.
Performance Improvement Policy	Ensures fair treatment in performance management.	Provides structured support before escalation.	Staff consultation, Clear Review data.
Recruitment and Selection Policy	Bias reduction, inclusive hiring.	Promotes opportunity access.	Policy workshops, E&D leads.

Special Leave Policy	Supports diverse personal needs (e.g. carers, bereavement, volunteering).	Enables time off for health, care, or hardship-related needs.	HR-led consultation, lived experience feedback.
Absence & Wellbeing Policy	Focus on wellbeing and mental health; supports return to work.	Addresses barriers faced by lower-income employees.	Employee feedback, HR working group.
Annual Leave & Public Holidays	Fair and transparent holiday entitlement; inclusive for part-time staff.	Considers socio-economic challenges around unpaid leave.	Policy working group, staff survey insights.
Code of Conduct	Upholds dignity and fairness for all staff.	Sets inclusive behavioural expectations.	External specialist input, SLT values workshops.
Dignity at Work	Addresses harassment and bullying; supports inclusion.	Promotes respect across all roles and income levels.	Consultation with HR, staff, trade unions.
Disciplinary Policy	Promotes consistency and fairness; protects against discrimination.	Supports structured responses that consider personal context.	Staff policy review group.
Employee Engagement Policy	Encourages inclusive voice; promotes fairness in communication.	Reinforces fairness in organisational culture.	Employee engagement data and SLT vision.
Equality & Diversity Policy	Framework for advancing equality and good relations.	Embedded principles across all HR policies.	Staff networks, E&D specialists.
Expenses Policy	Clarifies reimbursement; avoids financial disadvantage for staff.	Helps prevent upfront cost barriers.	Trade union reps, internal feedback.
Grievance Policy	Promotes fair process for raising concerns; protects vulnerable staff.	Ensures access regardless of grade or background.	Staff and HR consultation.
Pay, Equal Pay & Reward	Supports equal pay for work of equal value; removes bias in reward structures.	Addresses pay gaps and access to fair remuneration.	Policy group, HR consultation, SLT alignment.
Probationary Policy	Fair and supportive performance assessment process; adjustments for disability.	Supports retention and development for all staff.	Policy review team, SLT workshops.
Secondment Policy	Supports career development; ensures fair access to opportunities.	Enables skills development and mobility across grades.	Internal consultation and HR leads.

Whistleblowing Policy	Protects individuals raising concerns; promotes safe reporting.	Encourages inclusive workplace culture.	Policy development group, HR and union reps.
Natural Capital Innovation Fund	Inclusive appraisal and recruitment within funded projects.	Supports jobs, sustainability, and wellbeing in disadvantaged areas.	Wide consultation with partners, community groups, and fund design team.
Health & Safety Policy	Protects physical and psychological safety of all staff.	Ensures safe access for disabled employees; supports expectant parents.	H&S committee, staff forums, external specialists.
Loan Fund (2023/24)	Accessible funding application routes; inclusive promotion.	Supports economic recovery in rural and disadvantaged areas.	Business panel survey, roadshows, stakeholder feedback.

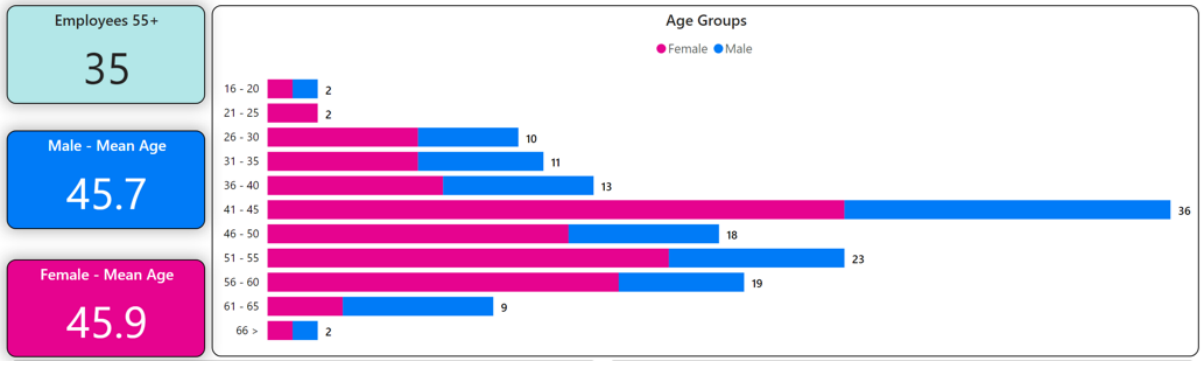
8.1 Appendix 2: Diversity Data Dashboard, up to 31/03/25

8.1.0 Headcount

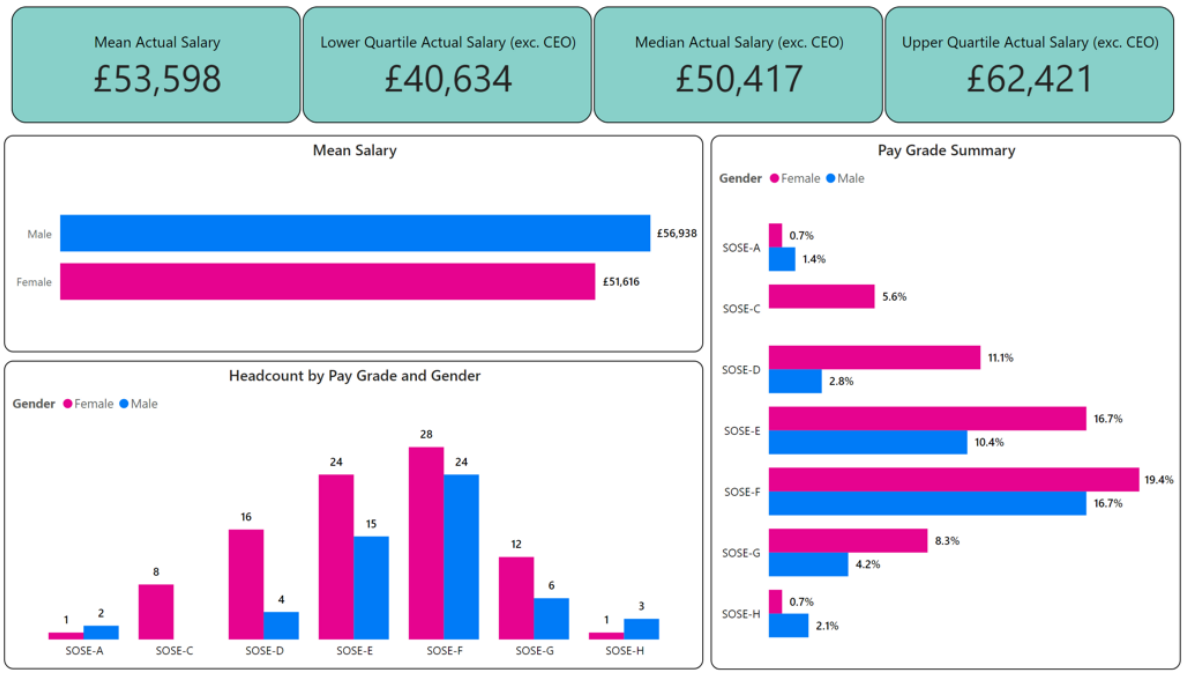
8.1.1 Leavers

Seonaid Mann
28th April 2025

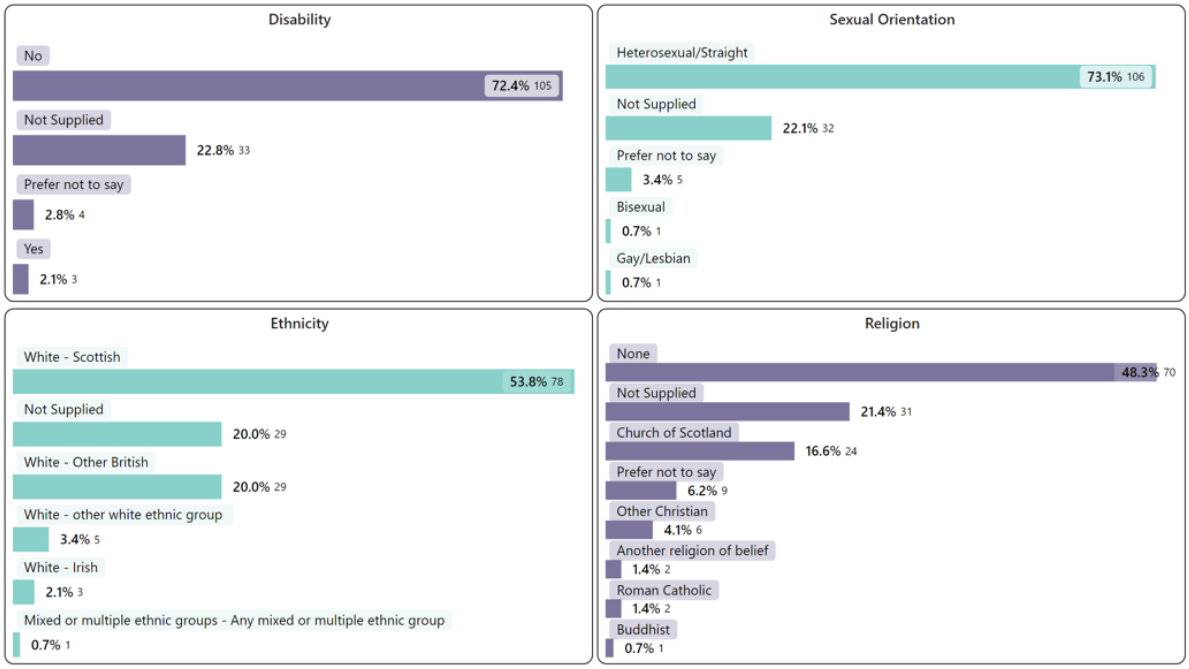
8.1.2 Age



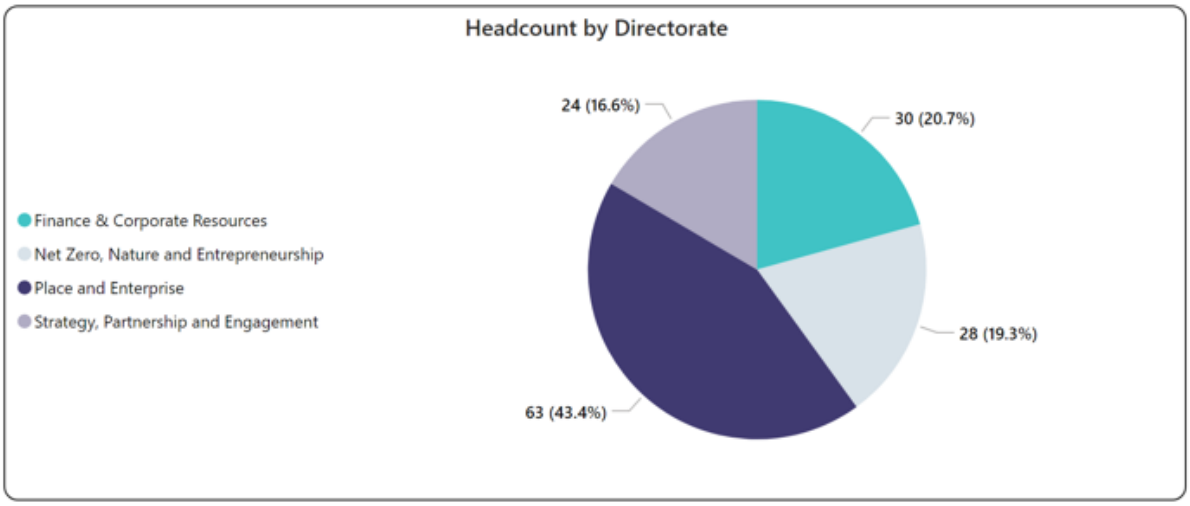
8.1.3 Salary and Grade

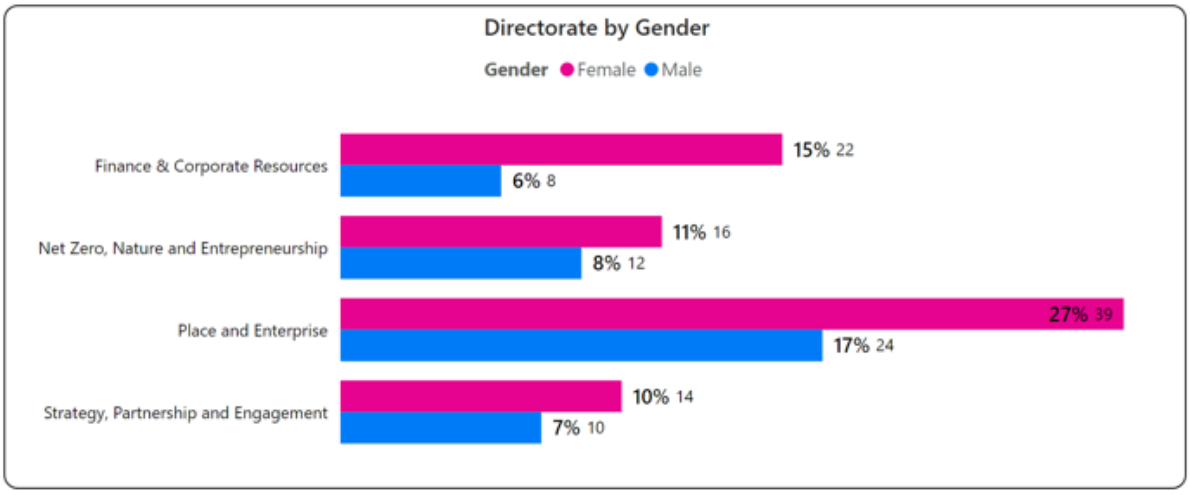
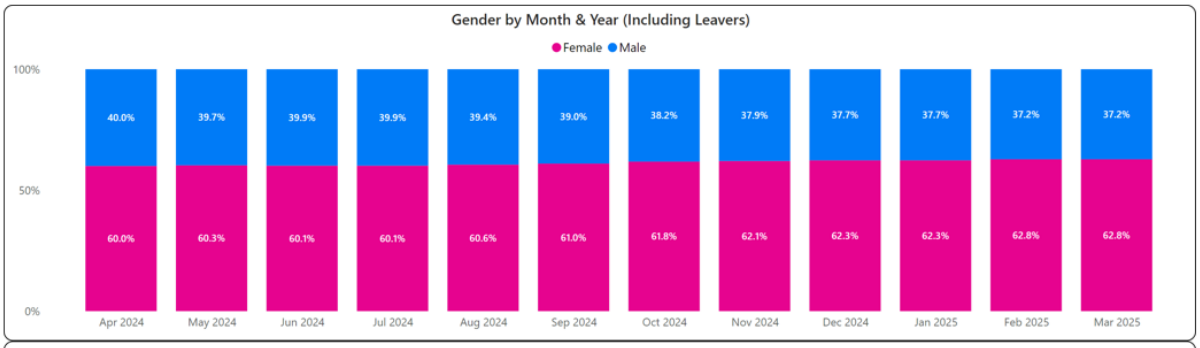
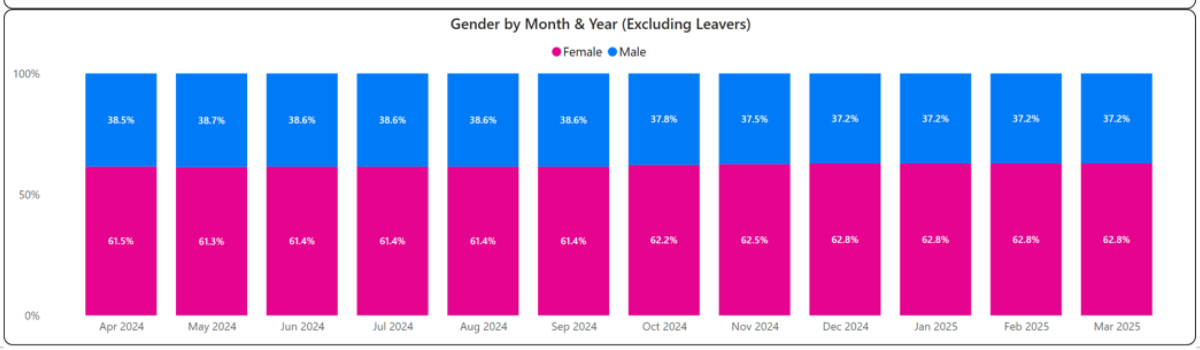


8.1.4 Disability, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity and Religion



8.1.5 Headcount by Directorate and Gender





8.1.6 Gender by Month and Year