

Mainstreaming equality:

Progress report 2021–23



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This report summarises our progress in delivering equality outcomes and related actions set by the [Accounts Commission](#) and [Audit Scotland](#) in April 2021. It supports our [public sector equality duty](#) to report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty at least every two years. We highlight our achievements since the [last progress report](#) in 2021 and identify where we can continue to improve.

Over the last two years we have continued to further embed equalities and human rights within our work, build knowledge and equip staff to support an inclusive culture. We have increased the frequency of our organisation-wide equality and human rights steering group (EHRSG) meetings to facilitate a more dynamic approach and embed a greater focus on strategic influencing, awareness raising and assurance. In January 2022, we updated our equality impact assessment (EIA) template and guidance to make the consultation and approval process and how to manage any improvement actions clearer. Since June 2022, we have had a dedicated senior manager leading on equalities and human rights.

Outcome 1: Our work supports the public sector to address inequalities including protected characteristics and socio-economic disadvantage, and to protect human rights

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

 AUDIT SCOTLAND

Reporting

Addressing inequalities and protecting human rights is a priority area in our [work programme](#). The Accounts Commission set out its [priorities for 2021-26](#), which includes shining a light on the contribution local government makes to lessening the impact of inequalities on different communities.

In our [annual audits](#), auditors are expected to report on equalities for all applicable public bodies and consider equalities in each audited body at least once during a five-year period.

Over the last two years, 47 per cent of our 62 performance audit and best value publications made some reference to [protected characteristics](#). Over 70 per cent mentioned social and economic factors, including the impact of Covid-19 on worsening existing inequalities, as well as protected characteristics.

Equality themes in audit reports, 2021-23



Note: includes performance audit reports, briefings, web outputs and blogs.

We are currently developing our approach to how we consider human rights in our audits but we have highlighted in some reports where certain groups face barriers to their rights being met:

- [East Dunbartonshire Council](#) – the council has considered people’s right to choice, dignity and control when setting its budget for 2021/22. People who choose to control their own budgets through self-directed care are offered the average rate among the council’s current suppliers, rather than a rate aligned to the lowest cost provider.
- [Social care briefing](#) – the report highlighted the negative impact Covid-19 had on people requiring support and their rights, the challenges facing carers affecting their rights. We recommended that the Scottish Government needs to develop an understanding of what a preventative and human rights-based approach to social care looks like and a plan for co-producing it.
- [Tackling child poverty briefing](#) – the report highlighted the range of children’s rights that link to child poverty and the effects on children. We recommended that the Scottish Government should consider how best to involve children and families with lived experience of poverty in providing strategic oversight of how it is tackling child poverty.

Examples of publications with a focus on equalities

Good practice

- **Dundee City Council** – has developed a British Sign Language (BSL) plan to enable BSL users (those individuals whose first or preferred language is BSL) to be fully involved in daily and public life as active, healthy citizens; delivering welfare rights support in GP surgeries; first Living Wage city in the UK; improved its approach to equality impact assessments and rolled out training.
- **NHS Tayside** – has completed a detailed review of equality, focusing on progressing equality for its staff and patients, and set new equality outcomes through consultation with staff and patients. Other activities include a Corporate Equalities Team, staff groups and networks to support staff in relation protected characteristics, an Equality and Diversity Champions scheme, and staff newsletters.
- **East Renfrewshire Council** – mandatory training on equalities introduced for all staff; supporting a pilot of **Equally Safe**, a Scottish Government project to support, strengthen and scale-up Violence Against Women and Girls training.
- **Angus Council** – has adopted a joint equality impact assessment and **Fairer Scotland Duty** assessment since January 2021 for all relevant committee reports. Tay Cities Region Deal projects are required to meet inclusive growth and Fairer Scotland Duty criteria.
- **Progress on implementing the devolved benefits** – the Scottish Government has continued to successfully deliver new and complex social security benefits, including the Child Disability Payment, in challenging circumstances. There is a conscious focus on the needs of service users, building on the principles of dignity, fairness, and respect. The Scottish Government has prioritised the delivery of the first phase of its new Scottish Child Payment to support low-income families.

Findings and recommendations

- Annual audit reports have made recommendations to several public bodies about improvements needed to mainstream equalities. This includes implementing staff training, keeping websites and information up to date, and publishing equality impact assessments and mainstreaming reports.
- **Covid-19 vaccination programme** – overall, excellent progress had been made in vaccinating a large proportion of the adult population, with vaccines delivered in a variety of ways to make it easier for more people to access them. However, a smaller proportion of younger people, those living in the most deprived areas and people from some ethnic groups have been vaccinated.
- **NHS in Scotland 2021** – the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on certain groups has led to the Scottish Government increasing its focus on tackling health inequalities, but there is no overarching strategy. Several programmes of work are under way targeting specific areas, for example on improving women's health and mental health, and improving race equality. But there are no separate plans for other groups such as people with disabilities or experiencing homelessness.
- **Local government overview 2022** – Covid-19 continues to disrupt council services, and those already experiencing inequality have felt the impacts of both the pandemic and service disruption most strongly. There is a risk of increased digital exclusion. Councils need better local data and community engagement. It is not clear if councils have carried out equality impact assessments or community consultation where they have made changes to service delivery.

Case studies

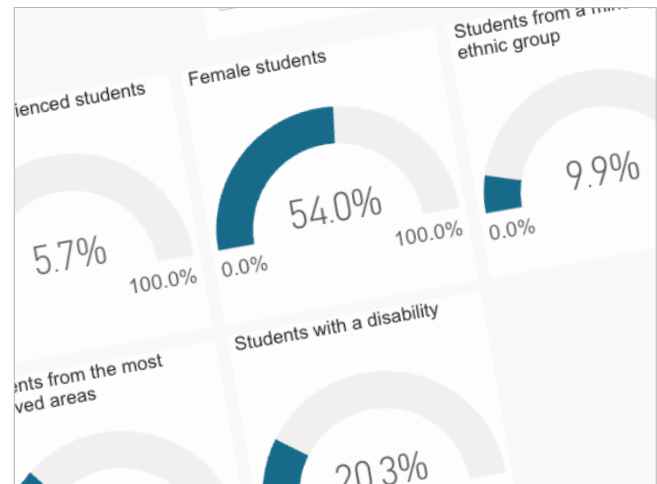


Public sector gender pay gap reporting

Our annual audit work found issues with some public bodies' gender pay gap reporting.

We reviewed information from 20 listed public bodies and highlighted how the public sector can improve gender pay gap reporting by:

- raising awareness of the importance of robust gender pay gap reporting
- providing a clear set of actions to drive improvement
- highlighting learning to support good practice.



Scotland's Colleges 2022

The report focused on equalities and the personal impact of Covid-19 on students by:

- looking at a wider evidence base and using a range of sources that had not been drawn upon previously
- including equalities related case studies
- using a range of interactive data.

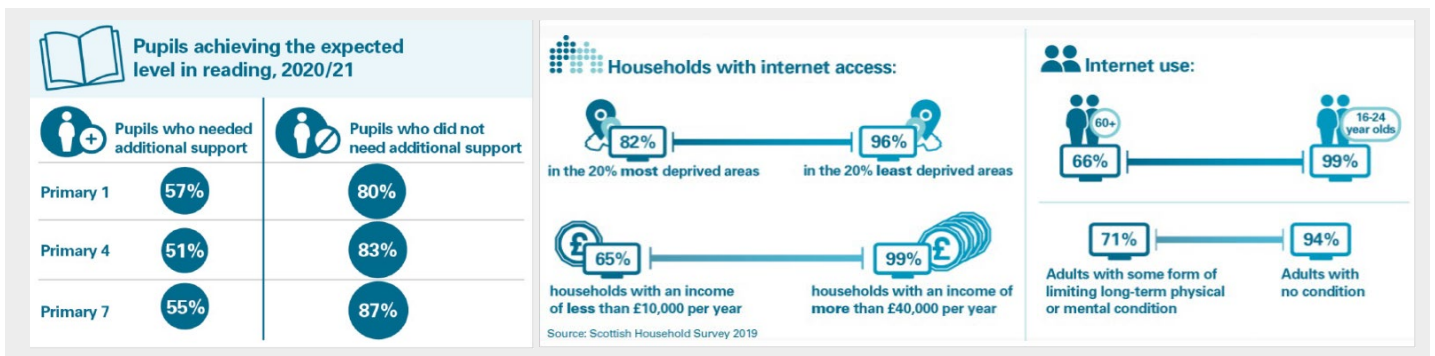
This led to clear findings and recommendations about Covid-19 worsening existing inequalities among students. Younger learners and students with additional support needs or poor mental health find remote learning more challenging.



To meet different communication needs of our audience we have:

- added more easy read guides, including for [Social care](#) and [Child poverty](#), and aim to do these for all reports

- included subtitles in animations and videos and tailored them to relevant audiences, for example Tackling child poverty briefing [video](#)
- published the [Comhairle nan Eilean Siar BVAR](#) in English and Gaelic
- expanded our range of publications to make them shorter, more visual and as accessible as possible. This has included a [Community empowerment Covid-19 web page update](#), and blogs on [Child and adolescent mental health services](#), [Digital exclusion](#), and [Additional support for learning](#).



Guidance for auditors

We are further embedding equalities considerations into our audit frameworks and guidance to support staff to mainstream equalities considerations in their audit work. We have:

- updated our guidance for briefings and blogs. The relevance of equalities must be considered, and appropriately factored, into any planned work
- refreshed guidance for auditors carrying out performance audits to consider equalities, and for the first time to start to consider human rights
- developed a new equalities and human rights audit guide with useful data sources, prompts and practical examples. It also introduces the concept of taking a human rights-based approach in our work based on the PANEL principles
- implemented a new tool for monitoring emerging issues and risks – including those relating to equality – across the public sector. This helps staff to identify relevant equality issues across all our work
- made financial audit planning guidance on equalities clearer and proactively recorded the extent to which auditors have considered equalities in their audit work.

Introducing a Human Rights Based Approach

- In May 2021, around 20 staff attended an awareness-raising event on taking a Human Rights–Based Approach (HRBA) delivered by the Scottish Human Rights Commission, with a further session delivered in September.
- In late 2021, we started self-assessment workshops and follow ups against the [PANEL principles](#), which underpin an HRBA. During 2022 we developed an action plan based on the findings and identified key areas for development. We are currently considering how we integrate a HRBA into our internal policies and our audit approach.

External influence and engagement

We have regular engagement with various external stakeholders to share insights and learning. This includes:

- Regular meetings with the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and the Scottish Government equalities mainstreaming team.
- Attending the Scottish Government’s [equality and human rights budget advisory group](#) as an observer, the Scottish Government’s human rights executive board, workshops to consider potential implications of the upcoming human rights bill, and the non-departmental public body equality forum.
- During 2022 we met with several public bodies to share good practice on taking a human rights-based approach to our work.

We use our knowledge and insight to influence practice by responding to consultations, recently these have included:

- [The Equalities, Human Rights and Civil Justice Committee’s pre-2022/23 Budget Scrutiny](#)
- [The Scottish Government’s review of the operation of the Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\) in Scotland \(stages 1 and 2\)](#)
- [The Scottish Government’s consultation on an equality evidence strategy](#)

The [Poverty and Inequality Commission](#) recommended that the Scottish Government should build on the findings of our [Planning for skills report](#) in developing its Child poverty delivery plan 2022-26.

A lack of detailed and intersectional data on equalities issues in Scotland limits our ability to report on and make recommendations to support this aspect of public bodies’ strategic decision-making. Our recent [blog on data gaps](#) highlights this. Our contribution to the Strategic Scrutiny Group’s response to the [Equality Data Improvement Programme](#) aimed to influence improvement in this important area.

Equalities and human rights advisory group (EHRAG)

EHRAG members provide external expert advice, including valuable feedback on our joint work programme and help us to focus on reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for the most vulnerable.

Since April 2021, audit team engagement with the EHRAG increased. Eleven teams engaged with the group on a range of equalities issues, bringing in lived experience, and helped to inform analysis. Some teams have returned to provide feedback on how the group's input shaped the audit and show how their contributions had made a difference.

NHS in Scotland 2021 engagement with EHRAG

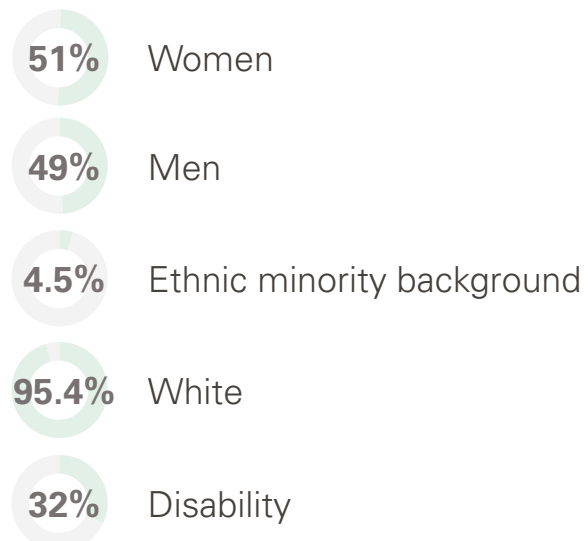
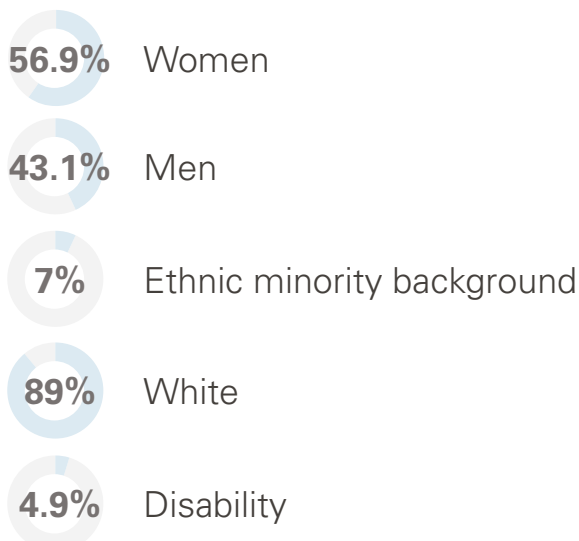
The audit scope took account of feedback from EHRAG, which contributed to the equalities messages in the final report. Discussions also highlighted useful data sources and points for consideration in other audit work, particularly social care and the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

Outcome 2: We will increase the diversity of people into Audit Scotland and their progression through every level of our organisation



Increasing diversity in our workforce

Audit Scotland has a [diverse workforce](#) compared to the Scottish population in relation to gender and ethnic minority background. We continue to receive an increasing number of recruitment applications from candidates who have declared that they are from an ethnic minority. The number of staff who have declared a disability at Audit Scotland has increased each year, but we recognise this remains low and it remains a key priority for us.



Source: [Scottish Government equality evidence finder](#).

A new HR system will allow collection of additional diversity data on gender identity, carers and socio-economic background alongside other protected characteristics. Together with an organisation-wide campaign to encourage people to declare this information, we plan to have this in place in 2023, to help us better understand the needs of our workforce.

In March 2022, our mean gender pay gap was 7.4%. This has decreased from 9.9% in 2021 and 11.3% in 2020, and is lower than the [Scotland figure of 10.1%](#). Our median gender pay gap was 12.5%. This has increased from 11.6% in 2020 and is slightly above the Scotland figure of 11.5%. We continue to advertise vacancies across a diverse range of media, highlighting our flexible, hybrid working approach. Our career development gateway and professional training scheme represent an important means by which we can achieve greater balance and female representation at senior levels. In 2021/22, there were 32 permanent promotions made across Audit Scotland, of which 65 per cent were women.

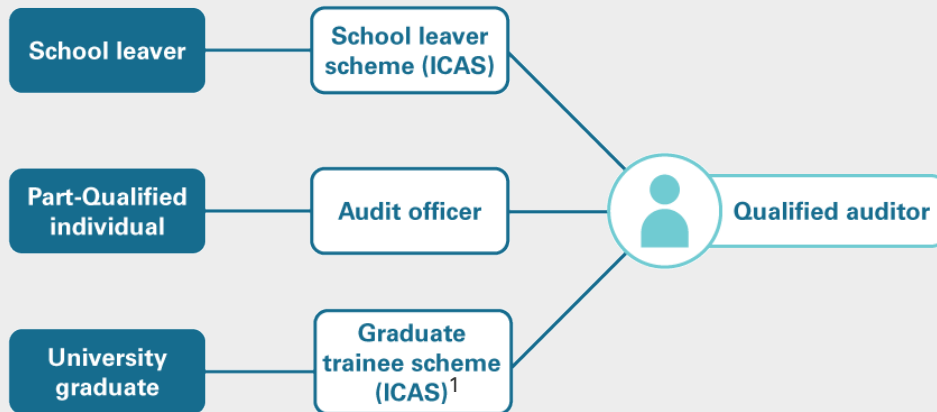
Widening recruitment

In 2021, we reviewed our recruitment practices and our broader organisational diversity strategy using a diversity advisor from [Business in the Community](#). We are working towards an improvement plan, linking to our equality outcomes. Recruitment and selection training for staff has a strong focus on equality and diversity. In 2023, we have been attracting and shortlisting for interview more candidates with a declared disability than we did in 2022. Figures will be published in our annual diversity report later this year.

We currently have three modern apprentices within our Business Support Services, and we take on school leavers to our trainee programme to study for an accountancy qualification through the Institute of Chartered Accountants Scotland (ICAS). A successful modern apprentice leaver progressed onto our trainee programme in 2022.

Following a review of our trainee auditor scheme over the last ten years, we are developing an organisation-wide strategy to widen access across all business groups in 2023 to increase career opportunities:

In 2021 we added an additional route for those working towards an accountancy qualification. Individuals can now join Audit Scotland at Audit Officer level and complete their qualification.



Note 1. ICAS: Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland

Proposals to further widen access:

- Auditor Modern Apprentice Scheme
- Part-Qualified Auditor Scheme
- College Leaver Scheme
- ICAS Professional Entry Route
- Lowering the Graduate scheme entry requirement from a 2:1 honours degree to a 2:2

To attract further interest from a more diverse range of candidates we have:

- highlighted our equality, diversity and inclusion strategy on our [website](#)
- updated our [careers page](#) to better reflect the diversity of staff and show our support for flexible working
- committed to providing [inclusive and accessible recruitment](#) as a disability confident employer
- broadened the websites where we advertise roles and started advertising on a couple of new diverse job boards including [WorkingMums.co.uk](#) and [Diversity Jobsite](#)
- partnered with [Sanctuary Graduates](#) to have student head-hunters in five Scottish universities promoting job opportunities to diverse groups, including ethnic minority students
- a professional trainee steering group who are also developing an internship programme and working more closely with schools to increase awareness of our opportunities.

Outcome 3: We will broaden our culture of diversity and inclusion, so all employees feel valued, engaged and contribute

We increased the visibility of our staff diversity network groups over the last year by:

- establishing a new equality, diversity and inclusion intranet site where each group can develop and maintain their own content
- inviting each network group to be part of the induction programme for new starts
- highlighting key dates in the diversity calendar and inviting staff to share personal experiences.

The managing menopause group was established and led by a member of staff in February 2022 to provide help and support for those affected directly or indirectly by the menopause. Highlights include:

- Around 70 people taking part in drop-in sessions and an online chat group.
- Members sharing lived experience of being directly or indirectly affected by menopause.
- Group members attended four external events and hosted two panel discussions.
- Audit Scotland has signed up to the [menopause workplace pledge](#).
- Plans to work towards being an accredited [menopause friendly employer](#).

To broaden knowledge of equality, diversity and inclusion we have other resources and support which include:

- a range of online learning including mental health, equality, diversity and inclusion training
- [Healthy Working Lives](#) activities which as a result we were accredited with a silver award in 2022 for our approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing
- hybrid working and a flexible working approach
- internal events led by external experts on subjects including diversity, mental health, disability inclusion and LGBT+ inclusion.

In 2022 key achievements included:

- [Elaine Boyd OBE](#), Audit Director at Audit Scotland, has been named as one of Britain's most influential disabled people in 2022 and recently featured in [Able magazine](#). Elaine has worked for Audit Scotland since 2002 and is a passionate advocate for equality, diversity and inclusion. Elaine was awarded the OBE in the 2023 New Year's Honours list.
- We continued to be recognised as 'very good to work for' by [Best Companies](#). Key factors include staff support from leadership, supporting charitable activities, recruitment practices to increase diversity and high levels of wellbeing.

Looking ahead

We recognise that we still have more to do and our focus over the next two years will include:

- Continuing to improve staff awareness and knowledge on inequalities and human rights.
- Exploring audit methodologies to help us mainstream equalities and better understand and reflect user views and lived experience in our work. This includes increasing our focus on protected characteristics, developing a service user engagement strategy and forming a youth panel.
- Increasing accessibility of our publications for a wider audience.
- Increasing the diversity of our workforce, particularly within more senior positions.
- Continuing to enhance and support staff equality networks.
- Working with an external equality partner who will provide advice and benchmark our progress.

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