



SOUTH of
SCOTLAND
ENTERPRISE

Equality Mainstreaming

In and For the South of Scotland

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Foreword

I'm pleased to introduce our first statutory mainstreaming report, a significant milestone for us here at SOSE. This report showcases our commitment to fostering equality, diversity, and inclusion in the South of Scotland. We've developed four key equality outcomes, which we believe will help create a more equitable, inclusive, and prosperous region.

We know that there's a lot of work to do to make our region a place where everyone can thrive, and we're eager to take on the challenge. Through a thorough data review and extensive engagement exercise, we plan to concentrate our efforts on promoting fair work practices, ensuring a just transition to net zero, enhancing the diversity of stakeholder impact, and supporting diversity within our organisation.

By actively pursuing these outcomes, we're confident we can create lasting, positive change in the South of Scotland. We also recognise that this is an ongoing journey, and our commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion needs to be central to everything we do, now and in the future.

As the CEO of SOSE, I'm proud of our progress so far, but I'm also well aware that we have more challenges to face as we move forward. I want to assure you that we'll keep listening, learning, and adapting to make sure our work stays relevant and effective in addressing everyone's needs in our region.

I want to express my gratitude to our staff, partners, and community members for their invaluable contributions and support in shaping our equality outcomes. Your input has been crucial in guiding our efforts, and we're excited to work together towards a more inclusive future for all in the South of Scotland.

In this report, you'll find details about how we mainstream equality in all of our activities, equality evidence and engagement, and a detailed analysis of each outcome. We look forward to sharing our successes, learning from our experiences, and engaging in an ongoing dialogue with you, our stakeholders, community members, and colleagues.

Thank you for your continued support, and let's work together to make a positive impact in the South of Scotland.

Jane Morrison-Ross, CEO





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1. Overview

1.0 Introduction

1.0.0 This, our first Mainstreaming Report, has been produced to comply with the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties)(Scotland) Regulations 2012. It sets out examples of the ways in which we work, and plan to work, to promote and increase equality of opportunity for people in Scotland who face disadvantage because of their protected characteristics or lived experience.

1.1 About South of Scotland Enterprise

1.1.0 South of Scotland Enterprise, SOSE for short, is a dedicated economic development agency, established by the Scottish Government in 2020, for the South of Scotland. We have been created in direct response to the unique economic opportunities and challenges facing the South of Scotland, and we are here to lead the delivery of a fresh and locally focused approach.

1.1.1 As a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB), we receive an annual strategic guidance letter from Scottish Government – the purpose of which is to make clear what is expected of us. The guidance highlights a need to focus our effort and resources on delivering the ambitions and actions of the National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET), and for us to tailor what we do in response to evidenced regional strengths and opportunities.

1.2 Economic Transformation and Equality

1.2.0 Given our focus on economic transformation, much of our work to advance equality is centred around ensuring that economic growth and transformation is inclusive and benefits everyone in society. By taking positive steps to promote equality and diversity, we can help to create a more innovative, competitive, and prosperous economy, and ensure that the benefits of economic growth are shared by all.

1.2.1 Furthermore, failing to address inequalities and promote diversity and inclusion in economic transformation efforts can have negative consequences for society as a whole. For example, if certain groups are excluded from opportunities or face barriers to participation in the economy, this can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including lower levels of productivity and economic growth, increased poverty and inequality.



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 ensure that we think about fairness and make 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 and equitable society.

2.0.1 We recognise that the demographic of the population in the south of Scotland is not as diverse as other areas of the country, but want to ensure that our work contributes towards the creation of a region where opportunity for all is the norm, regardless of whether they hold a protected characteristic or not.

2.1 Strategy

2.1.0 The corporate strategy outlined in our 5 year plan (2023 – 2028) focuses on 6 key priorities, entitled the 6 As:

- ◆ Advancing innovation and improving productivity
- ◆ Accelerating net zero and nature-positive solutions
- ◆ Advocating for Fair Work and equality
- ◆ Attracting ambitious investment
- ◆ Awakenning entrepreneurial talent
- ◆ Activating and empowering enterprising communities

These key priorities are designed to promote inclusive economic growth, support businesses and communities, and improve skills and employment opportunities for all. This includes specific initiatives to address inequality and promote diversity, such as supporting female and youth-led businesses and promoting equal pay and fair employment practices.

Additionally, the plan emphasises the importance of building strong relationships between different communities and working collaboratively to promote social cohesion and understanding. Overall, the strategy is designed to create a more equal, inclusive, and cohesive society in the South of Scotland.

2.1.1 Our Equality Strategy sets out a clear statement of purpose around equality, diversity and inclusion and why taking action on this is essential. It articulates our policy and what we want to achieve as we develop this agenda over time. Our Equality Strategy is based around 3 key themes, which align with our newly developed Equality Outcomes on which we will concentrate over the next 3 years:

- ◆ Increasing the accessibility of our services to all of the people, organisations and communities across the South of Scotland, with an initial focus on women and young people
- ◆ Increasing the diversity of our own workforce and that of our Board
- ◆ Culture: embedding equality and diversity into SOSE's DNA and economic growth statistics

2.2 SOSE Key Themes

2.2.0 Our work is focused on several overarching themes 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.
- ◆ Creating Opportunities: We are in the process of establishing a new Youth Advisory Forum to assist us to be better informed about the challenges faced by young people in the region, as well as providing the 16 members with opportunities to increase their confidence, gain valuable in-work experience and develop their network of contacts. One of the aims of the forum is that it will better prepare the young people for the world of work, encourage them to take on decision-making positions and to take a more active role within their local communities.

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 In the recruitment of board of management, we worked with Changing the Chemistry, a not-for-profit organisation which supports diversity and the recruitment of board members. The gender balance of our Board of Management exceeds the Scottish Government's 50:50 aim, with 55% female board members.
- 2.3.2 We are committed to increasing the diversity of our Board and will take action to encourage underrepresented groups to apply including awareness of the role of Board members and the benefits it offers to the individual and the community.

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 EQIA process involves the following key steps:
- ◆ Scoping: We start by identifying the policies, practices, or decisions that need to undergo an EQIA, 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 EQIA 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 EQIA 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 EQIAs 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.

2.5 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, varying platforms and can provide alternative formats of our communication materials as requested.

- 2.5.3 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.
- 2.5.4 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.
- 2.5.5 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 right from the start of each employee's journey with us. 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 regular, mandatory E, D & I training. 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 achieved Level 1 of the Disability Confident scheme, demonstrating our commitment to creating a more inclusive and accessible work environment for individuals with disabilities. Moving forward, we plan to progress to the next level of the Disability Confident scheme, which involves taking further action to ensure our recruitment processes are fully accessible and providing additional support and resources for employees with disabilities.

2.6.3 Code of Conduct



Our code of conduct advances equality by emphasising the importance of fair work, diverse thinking, and creating opportunities for all. It is guided by organisational values that promote inclusivity, responsibility, boldness, open-mindedness, and ambition. Employees are expected to maintain professional conduct, treat colleagues with dignity and respect at all times. 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 work environment, this policy supports the advancement of equality for all employees within SOSE.

2.6.4 Special Leave



We provide a flexible and inclusive range of special leave options that cater to diverse needs and circumstances, such as personal and family events, community involvement, education, and healthcare access. Through these options, we acknowledge various family structures, giving managers discretion when granting leave, and have established clear communication channels for addressing concerns, ultimately fostering a more equal, fair, and supportive work environment for all employees.

2.6.5 Sickness and Absence



We promote a supportive and inclusive work environment that considers the health and well-being of all employees. We encourage open communication and proactive engagement in maintaining a healthy work-life balance. We are committed 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 reasonable adjustments, return to work plans, and redeployment, we aim to help employees improve their attendance and contribute effectively to the organisation.

2.6.6 **Parental Leave, Dependants Leave and Childcare**



We provide support and provisions for employees with parental or caring responsibilities, ensuring they can effectively balance work and personal life. Workers can request various types of leave such as Parental, Dependants, Fostering Leave, as well as Tax-Free Childcare, and we outline clear entitlements and procedures for employees. By offering paid leave for dependants and fostering, and unpaid parental leave, we acknowledge the diverse needs of employees with different family structures and situations. Our consideration for part-time employees ensures that all workers are fairly accommodated, fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment.

2.6.7 **Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Leave**



Various types of leave are available, including maternity, adoption, ordinary parental, and shared parental leave. By providing clear guidelines for accessing leave and pay entitlements, we recognise the diverse needs of employees in different family structures and situations. Moreover, we acknowledge the importance of work-life balance, offering employees the opportunity to take time off during significant family events without being financially penalised.

2.6.8 **Annual Leave**



We advance equality by promoting a healthy work-life balance through our annual leave entitlement, 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.

2.6.9 **Grievances**



We promote a fair, quick, and consistent grievance resolution process for SOSE employees. It encourages a supportive and safe working environment, fostering transparency and openness. By addressing employee concerns promptly, we support diverse thinking, innovation, and the development of positive employment relationships. By treating all grievances equally, regardless of an employee's background or position, we contribute to a more inclusive and equitable workplace. Furthermore, the importance of employee well-being and effective communication are emphasised, thereby helping to maintain a healthy, diverse, and productive workforce.

2.6.10 Flexible Working



We continually promote 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, we reduce stress and foster a supportive work environment. Additionally, we make provisions for time off in lieu, informal flexibility, and formal flexible working requests such as job sharing, compressed hours, unpaid leave, or part-time work. These options accommodate various personal circumstances and empower employees to manage their time more effectively.

2.6.11 Disciplinary Procedures



We cultivate a fair, open, and understanding work environment that empowers employees to speak up when mistakes happen. Additionally, we emphasise the importance of informal problem resolution, where possible, through good communication and collaboration. By acknowledging different degrees of seriousness in mistakes and addressing conduct issues fairly and promptly, we create a safe and welcoming atmosphere for all stakeholders, fostering a more equal and respectful workplace.

2.6.12 Dignity at Work



We recognise the responsibilities of SOSE and its employees to prevent bullying, harassment, discrimination, and victimisation in the workplace. We protect individuals with various “protected characteristics” and promote inclusivity and diversity by emphasising the importance of treating others with dignity and respect. We provide a clear framework for raising concerns and addressing unacceptable behaviour, whether informally or formally, and offer mediation as a potential resolution method. By fostering a culture of understanding, respect, and open communication we actively work towards the creation of a continually equitable and discrimination-free workplace.

2.6.13 Adverse Weather and Disruption to Public Transport



We demonstrate due regard to the public sector equality duty by prioritising the health, safety, and well-being of all employees, regardless of their individual circumstances. By acknowledging the challenges that employees may face when attending work during adverse weather or public transport disruptions we ensure minimal disruption to our services. We encourage employees to work from alternative locations or from home when necessary and emphasise the importance of following safety procedures while traveling. By allowing flexibility and understanding employees’ unique situations, we promote a fair and inclusive work environment.

2.6.14 **Resourcing**



We promote fairness, objectivity, and merit-based selection throughout our recruitment and deployment processes. We emphasise the criticality of equal opportunities, diverse employment types, accurate job descriptions, and robust selection processes. Furthermore, we foster a family-friendly work environment, prioritising existing employees, and encourage applications from underrepresented groups. By adhering to these guidelines, we foster an inclusive work environment that aligns with the principles of the public sector equality duty.

2.6.15 **Relocation**



When required, we can provide financial support to new and existing employees who need to move home location in order to take up a permanent post within the organisation. 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 working environment.

2.6.16 **Assignments**



We promote cross-functional working and provide all employees with equal access to opportunities within the organisation. We encourage 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, we can ensure 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.

2.6.17 **Probationary Policy**



We pay 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, ensuring 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, we encourage open communication and dialogue, enabling employees to receive the necessary support to succeed in their roles. Additionally, we account for potential underlying medical conditions or disabilities that may affect an employee's performance, ensuring that appropriate support and accommodations are provided.

2.6.18 **Performance Improvement**



We provide clear guidelines for staff and management to support and enhance the performance of all employees. We emphasise understanding employee motivation, setting clear and concise goals using the SMART framework, and promoting continuous feedback through both informal and formal channels. In situations where performance improvements are not achieved, we outline 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.

2.6.19 **Pay and Reward**



We have established a transparent, objective, and bias-free pay and reward system at SOSE to reduce any pay gaps and attract skilled and committed employees. We are transparent in our approach to pay grades, job evaluation, pay progression, recruitment, promotions, responsibility allowances, market supplements, and employee benefits. SOSE regularly reviews its pay practices, monitors their impact, and engages with employees and trade unions to ensure compliance with equal pay practices and avoid discrimination in its pay and reward systems.

2.6.20 **Whistleblowing**



There are established guidelines for SOSE employees to safely raise concerns about misconduct, wrongdoing, or fraud within the organisation without fear of reprisal or discrimination. We safeguard employees who raise genuine concerns from victimisation and ensure confidentiality, providing additional support through HR, trade union representatives, and external organisations like the Employee Assistance Programme and Public Concern at Work.

2.6.21 **Employee Volunteering**



We promote SOSE's commitment to taking an active role in the communities we serve by supporting employee volunteering during working hours. We align with the Scottish Government's National Strategy for Economic Transformation by emphasising environmental, social, and local community benefits. Employees can request up to 21 hours of paid volunteering leave per year (pro-rata for part-time). 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.

2.6.22 Redundancy

We ensure a fair, consistent, objective, and non-discriminatory selection process for redundancies. SOSE commits to consulting with recognised trade unions and exploring measures to avoid or minimise redundancies, such as redeployment, retraining, and voluntary severance.

SOSE, in consultation with the recognised Trade Unions, will seek to avoid compulsory redundancy and, failing this, minimise the effects of redundancies through the provision of sufficient time and effort to find alternative employment for surplus staff. Where compulsory redundancy is inevitable, SOSE will handle the redundancy in the most fair, consistent and sympathetic manner possible and minimise as far as possible any hardship that may be suffered by the employees concerned.

To note, however, in line with recent pay policy and in agreement with unions, SOSE has no compulsory redundancy policy in option.

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. Staff Data

3.0 Gathering and Using Information

- 3.0.0 We ask all of 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.
- 3.0.1 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. Given the length of time which our organisation has been established, data on progression and retention is limited to the extent that it is not meaningful. We plan to use this data snapshot as a baseline and we will publish data on progression and retention in our interim 2025 report.
- 3.0.2 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 Equality and Fair Work Lead, HR staff and Senior Management Team. We investigate circumstances and take action 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.
- 3.0.3 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 in order to avoid individuals being identified.
- 3.0.4 The SOSE diversity data dashboard is attached at Appendix 1

3.1 Data by Individual Protected Characteristic

3.1.0 Age

The age group with the highest number of incumbents is 41-45 (21.09%), followed by 51-55 (17.5%). The recruitment data shows broad correlation with age and successful outcome at interview, with the proportion of applicants by age group aligning with the proportion of applicants appointed.

3.1.1 **Disability**

3.5% of staff have declared a disability or a long-term health condition. Looking at the Scottish Government estimates where approximately 10% of the population who are economically active have a long-term activity limiting health problem, we anticipate that the disability disclosure rate may be underreported and will take action to address this in our Equality Outcomes. There is no significant difference between the proportion of applicants with a disability and the proportion of appointees.

3.1.2 **Gender Reassignment**

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

3.1.3 **Pregnancy or Maternity**

The number of employees who have declared that they are pregnant and/or have been on maternity leave is not being specified as it is fewer than ten.

3.1.4 **Race**

82.5% of staff have declared that they are white. The declared percentage of ethnic minority staff and applicants is less than 1%. While this aligns with regional demographics, we know that we can do more to attract diverse candidates and we hope to focus on this over the course of our Equality Outcomes.

3.1.5 **Religion or Belief**


25.9% of staff have declared a Christian based religion (Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and Other Christian). This is lower than the regional benchmark (approximately 50%). 46.9% of staff have no religion or belief, which is higher than the national and regional indicators. It is noted that the current religious data in Scotland is based on the 2011 census, and it is understood that the proportions are likely to change in the yet to be published 2022 census. With reference to recruitment, applicants without a religion or belief had a significantly lower likelihood of appointment.

3.1.6 **Sex**

61.5% of staff are female and 38.5% male. In terms of recruitment, female applicants had a proportionately higher rate of appointments than male (53.5% female applicants and 44.3% male).

3.1.7 **Sexual Orientation**

Approximately 1.5% of staff are gay, lesbian or bisexual. While there is currently no national comparators available, recently published data from the England, Wales and



Northern Ireland census show approximately 3% as a comparison. 74.8% of SOSE staff have declared that they are heterosexual/straight. The proportion of gay, lesbian and bisexual staff broadly aligns with the proportion of gay, lesbian and bisexual applicants.

4. Gender Pay Report

4.0 Technical Note

4.0.0 Two calculations have been used:

- ◆ The **mean**, which is more commonly referred to as the average, that is, data values are totalled, and the sum is divided by the population; and
- ◆ the **median**, which is the middle number, that is, the data value at which 50% of data values are above it, and 50% of data values are below it. To find the median, data is listed in numerical order from smallest to largest in order to identify the middle entry.

4.0.1 This Report also considers pay quartiles, which have been developed by determining the hourly rate of pay for each male and female full-pay relevant employee and then ranking those employees in order from lowest paid to highest paid. The employees are then divided and ranked into four sections, each comprising (so far as possible) an equal number of employees, to determine the lower, lower middle, upper middle and upper quartile pay bands. Accordingly, Quartile 1 consists of the lowest salary ranges, and Quartile 4 consists of the highest.

4.1 Pay Gaps

4.1.0 The mean pay gap at SOSE is 9.78%. This is very similar to the national pay gap of 10.1%. The median pay gap is 17.77%. There is no national median benchmark to use as a comparator.

4.1.1 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.

4.1.2 The SOSE pay gap is related to the distribution of male and female SOSE staff within the pay and grading system pay quartile analysis as shown below, where there are higher proportions of male staff in the upper quartiles, and lower proportions in the lower quartiles:

Gender

Gender	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
Female	61.5%	53.5%	-8.1%	55.2%	-6.3%
Male	38.5%	44.3%	+5.8%	42.8%	+4.4%
Not Supplied		0.9%	+0.9%	1.1%	+1.1%
Prefer Not To Say		1.3%	+1.3%	0.9%	+0.9%

4.2 Advancing Equality in Pay

4.2.0 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.

4.3 Equal Pay Policy

4.3.0 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

4.3.1 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.

4.3.2 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.

Through these actions, 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.

5. Board Diversity

5.0 Background

5.0.0 Reporting Period: 1 May 2021 to 30 April 2023

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.

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. If the Board has 11 non-executive members, the objective is that the board has 5 non-executive members who are women.

5.1 SOSE's Board

5.1.0 We have a Board of 10 non-executive members, plus Chair and our Chief Executive.

5.1.1 We have met the 50% female representation objective on our non-executive Board since SOSE was formed on 1st April 2020:

Year	No. Non-Executive Board Members	Women	Men
2020	10	5	5
2021	10	5	5
2022	10	6	4
2023	10	6	4

5.2 Appointments

5.2.0 In 2021/22 we ran a competitive interview round for 4 board vacancies:

	Number (%)
Applications	47
Female Applications	17 (36.2%)
Interviewed	12
Females Interviewed	6 (50%)
Appointed	4
Females appointed	3 (75%)

- 5.2.1 The appointment process took place during COVID 19 between June 2021 and March 2022 and SOSE worked with Scottish Government who were responsible for appointing our Board members.
- 5.2.2 A proactive approach was taken to encourage applications from women which included working with networking organisation, Changing the Chemistry, who facilitated a pre-recorded session with the Chair, Scottish Government Public Appointments Team plus male and female Board members.
- 5.2.3 The Chair explained why the Board were seeking certain skills and knowledge and Board members shared their experiences of what to expect as a Board member and why they wanted to be involved. Some of the Board members had no previous Board experience and they openly shared their views.
- 5.2.4 The recorded session was shared widely across networks and was accessible 24/7 on a number of platforms. Contact details were provided for any questions.
- 5.2.5 We also ensured the use of gender-neutral language in all documentation and advertising.
- 5.2.6 Our Board currently has more than 50% female representation and we aim to sustain this position as we look to future Board appointment rounds. We will aim to build on the activity to attract applications from women to ensure that we continue to meet the gender representation objective.

6. Equality Evidence

6.0 Aim

- 6.0.0 When developing these equality outcomes, it is essential to consider equality evidence. This evidence will help us to identify areas of inequality and discrimination, and to develop appropriate strategies to address them. It will also help us ensure that we are targeting our efforts effectively, as without a thorough understanding of the nature and extent of inequality, it is difficult to develop outcomes that will make a real difference to people's lives.
- 6.0.1 Considering equality evidence should also help us demonstrate a transparent approach to our work to support us in building trust with the communities we serve and encouraging greater participation.

6.1 Approach


- 6.1.0 We are using three sets of data in gathering and analysing evidence:
- ◆ A semi-iterative review of data relevant to our work and remit, including demographics, labour, societal and economic issues.
 - ◆ Evidence from engagement with community groups and people who share protected characteristics (and/or their representatives); and
 - ◆ Staff data (which is included at Section 4),

6.2 Semi Iterative Review

6.2.0 Demographics

Age: Scotland has an ageing population, and the range of difficulties this brings with it are felt particularly severely in rural areas like the Scottish Borders and Dumfries and Galloway. Remote rural areas are ageing more profoundly than other types of rural and urban areas due to a continuous loss of young people and the ageing of in-migrants returning or arriving to the area.

Sex: In Scotland, the gender demographics are fairly evenly split between men and women. According to the 2011 Census, women made up 50.9% of the population, while men made up 49.1%. However, there are some differences in gender demographics between different areas of Scotland, including the south of Scotland. For example, in the Scottish Borders, there are slightly more women than men, with women making up 51.3% of the population. In Dumfries and Galloway, however, men make up a slightly



higher proportion of the population, with 50.3% of residents being male. These differences may be influenced by a range of factors, including historical patterns of migration, industry and employment trends, and cultural and social factors.

Gender Reassignment: there is limited data available on the number of people who are transgender in Scotland or in specific regions such as the south of Scotland.

Pregnancy and Maternity: The birth rate in the south of Scotland is lower than the national birth rate in Scotland. According to data from the National Records of Scotland, the birth rate in Scotland was 11.0 births per 1,000 population in 2020. In comparison, the birth rate in the Scottish Borders was 9.0 births per 1,000 population, while in Dumfries and Galloway, the birth rate was 10.5 births per 1,000 population.

Race: The south of Scotland has a much lower proportion of non-white residents compared to the national data in Scotland. According to the 2011 Census, only 1.3% of the population in the Scottish Borders identified as non-white, compared with the national figure of 4%. In Dumfries and Galloway, the figure was slightly higher at 2.5%, but still lower than the national average.


Religion or Belief: Religion or belief demographics in the south of Scotland are broadly similar to national data in Scotland. According to the 2011 Census, around 52% of the population in Scotland identified as Christian, while around 37% identified as having no religion. In the Scottish Borders, around 60% of the population identified as Christian, with the Church of Scotland being the largest denomination. In Dumfries and Galloway, around 52% of the population identified as Christian, with the Catholic Church being the largest denomination. The remaining population in both areas identified as having no religion or identified with other religions or beliefs.

Disability: Disability demographics in the south of Scotland are broadly similar to national data in Scotland. According to the 2011 Census, around 19% of the population in Scotland reported having a long-term health problem or disability. In the Scottish Borders, around 18% of the population reported having a long-term health problem or disability, while in Dumfries and Galloway, around 22% of the population reported having a long-term health problem or disability.

Sexual orientation: Sexual orientation demographics in the south of Scotland are not widely available, but national data in Scotland suggests that around 2% of the population identifies as lesbian, gay or bisexual.

6.2.1 **Entrepreneurship and Business Ownership – Barriers for Protected Groups**

- ◆ Discrimination when accessing finance - this can take the form of bias or prejudice from lenders, or systemic barriers such as lack of access to networks or information about available funding options.
- ◆ Limited access to information – protected groups may have limited access to information to support them. This can take the form of bias or prejudice from



lenders, or systemic barriers such as lack of access to networks or information about available funding options.

- ◆ Limited collateral or assets: Entrepreneurs and business owners who have protected characteristics may have limited collateral or assets to offer as security for loans, which can make it more difficult for them to access finance. This can be due to discrimination in access to property ownership or other assets, or to systemic barriers such as limited access to educational or employment opportunities.
- ◆ Limited social networks: Entrepreneurs and business owners who have protected characteristics may have limited social networks or connections within the business community, which can make it more difficult for them to access funding or to form partnerships with other businesses.
- ◆ Limited capacity: Entrepreneurs and business owners who have protected characteristics may have limited capacity to access business support due to factors such as disability, health conditions or caring responsibilities. This can make it more difficult for them to support, or to engage with the complex processes which can be involved.
- ◆ Lack of tailored support: Entrepreneurs and business owners who have protected characteristics may require tailored support and advice to access finance, which may not always be available or accessible. This can be due to a lack of understanding or expertise within the financial sector, or to systemic barriers such as limited access to training or support services.
- ◆ Addressing these barriers is essential to create a more equal and inclusive economy that values and supports entrepreneurs and business owners who have protected characteristics. This can involve initiatives such as the provision of tailored support and advice, the development of partnerships and networks to support access to finance, and the creation of awareness-raising campaigns to tackle discrimination and increase understanding of the barriers faced by underrepresented groups.

6.2.2 **Fair Work**

Fair Work in Scotland refers to the Scottish Government's commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable labour market that provides equal opportunities, fair treatment, and support for all workers, regardless of their background or personal circumstances. The Fair Work Framework, developed by the Fair Work Convention, outlines five key dimensions of fair work: effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment, and respect.

Protected groups can face barriers that limit their access to fair work opportunities. Some of these barriers include:

- ◆ **Discrimination and Bias:** Individuals from protected groups may experience direct or indirect discrimination during recruitment, promotion, and day-to-day work activities. This can include biases in hiring decisions, unequal pay, and limited access to training and development opportunities.
- ◆ **Stereotyping and Prejudice:** Stereotyping and prejudiced attitudes can perpetuate misconceptions about the abilities and potential of individuals from protected groups. These attitudes can limit opportunities and create a hostile work environment.
- ◆ **Inadequate Workplace Policies and Practices:** Inflexible working arrangements, lack of diversity and inclusion initiatives, and insufficient support for employees with specific needs can make it difficult for individuals from protected groups to access and sustain fair work opportunities.
- ◆ **Limited Access to Education and Training:** Individuals from some protected groups may have lower levels of educational attainment or limited access to vocational training, which can impact their ability to access fair work opportunities and career progression.
- ◆ **Lack of Representation:** Underrepresentation of protected groups in leadership positions and decision-making roles can perpetuate existing inequalities and limit the extent to which policies and practices are inclusive and fair.
- ◆ **Intersectionality:** Individuals who belong to multiple protected groups may face compounded barriers due to the interaction of different aspects of their identity, such as gender, race, and disability.

6.2.3 **Net Zero and the Green Economy**

The green economy in Scotland, focused on sustainable development, clean energy, and environmental protection, offers significant potential for job creation and economic growth. However, protected groups may face barriers that limit their access to opportunities in the green economy. Some of these barriers include:


- ◆ **Lack of Awareness and Information:** Individuals from protected groups may have limited awareness of the career opportunities and pathways in the green economy, due to a lack of targeted information or outreach efforts.
- ◆ **Access to Education and Training:** Quality education and training opportunities in fields related to the green economy, such as renewable energy, environmental sciences, and sustainable technologies, may not be readily available or accessible to individuals from protected groups.
- ◆ **Discrimination and Bias:** Similar to other sectors, protected groups may face direct or indirect discrimination in the green economy during recruitment, promotion, and day-to-day work activities. Biases in hiring and promotion decisions can limit their access to opportunities in this sector.

- ◆ **Workplace Inclusivity:** The green economy may not be perceived as an inclusive sector, deterring individuals from protected groups from pursuing careers in this area. Organisations within the sector may need to develop and implement diversity and inclusion strategies to create a more welcoming environment for all employees.
- ◆ **Socioeconomic Factors:** Individuals from protected groups may face socioeconomic challenges that limit their ability to access opportunities in the green economy, such as poverty, lack of access to affordable housing, or limited transportation options.
- ◆ **Limited Representation:** Underrepresentation of protected groups in decision-making roles and leadership positions within the green economy can perpetuate existing inequalities and limit the extent to which policies and practices are inclusive and accessible.

6.3 Engagement

- 6.3.0 SOSEs engagement strategy sets out our goal to ensure we focus our efforts and resources on addressing the issues that really matter most to those living and working in the region, which is impossible to achieve unless we listen and take actions based upon what we have learnt. The strategy is based on the principles of inclusivity and accessibility.
- 6.3.1 We have established a committee which meets quarterly, entitled the Just Transition Committee, to advise us on the key issues impacting workers in SOSEs locus and what might be done to advance their interests in the south of Scotland.
- 6.3.2 With the support of the Southern Uplands Partnership, we conducted an engagement tour to raise awareness of our goals, gather feedback on our focus and performance, and explore the priorities of people, organisations, and businesses in the region. A total of 416 people were engaged in public and online sessions, with an additional 54 people engaged through business breakfasts.
- 6.3.3 Recognising the challenge of reaching and engaging seldom-heard voices, we commissioned Sleeping Giants Community Development CIC to support the engagement process. Together, we designed and delivered outreach and engagement initiatives targeting young people, women, other protected characteristic groups, and those experiencing financial exclusion or economic inactivity.
- ◆ Participants in focus groups discussed their reasons for moving to or staying in the region. Financial constraints were cited as a reason for staying, but many would consider moving if job opportunities arose elsewhere. Out of 39 autistic young people or those with additional support needs, 22 wanted to stay due to family, friends, and familiarity. Others cited lack of activities, poor social life, and negative perceptions of local towns as reasons for leaving.

- ◆ To encourage more people to move to the area, improved transport links were the most commonly requested (21 out of 53 respondents). Better connections between specific towns and general improvements to road and public transport infrastructure were desired. Other popular suggestions included more jobs (particularly better paid and diverse jobs), more affordable housing, and improved social, cultural, and leisure facilities. Less common suggestions involved regenerating high streets, supporting businesses, promoting the area and remote work opportunities, improving connectivity, and enhancing the NHS.
- ◆ Focus group findings echoed the survey results, with additional suggestions specific to the target groups' experiences, such as providing a more inclusive social scene, offering multicultural events, and increasing opportunities for gaining work experience.
- ◆ To involve a wider diversity of people in its work and strengthen its engagement approach, participants suggested SOSE should increase awareness and keep conversations going. Out of 73 survey respondents, only 36 (49.3%) had previously heard of SOSE, with even lower awareness among those considered within the focus groups' target. Suggestions for increasing awareness included engaging with groups and organisations, asking for public input, and utilising various communication channels.
- ◆ To maintain engagement, participants recommended more engagement activities such as surveys, local community events, and communication through social media and mailouts. Specific suggestions included being more visible and transparent, advertising on social media, building relationships with diverse groups, working with schools, and providing promotional materials. Focus group participants also suggested engaging in genuine dialogue, visiting schools and colleges, communicating how views have been used, participating in community events, and organising face-to-face meetings and events.
- ◆ To include a wider diversity of people in their work, survey respondents suggested improving communication and awareness of SOSE and its activities. Community outreach and engagement, along with recruitment approaches, were also emphasised. Some called for advertising available opportunities, while others proposed taking chances on passionate individuals lacking experience, conducting equality audits, and offering a wide range of jobs.
- ◆ Focus group participants provided specific suggestions for inclusivity in different equality groups:
 - Autistic young people/young people with additional support needs: Work with youth clubs, offer paid placements, mentorships, support experience gaining, and provide education on autism in the workplace.
 - Ethnic minorities: Ensure equal access to training and job opportunities, offer interview training and mentoring, implement positive action, and



provide staff training on racism, equality, diversity, and unconscious bias. SOSE should also support language classes.

- Financially excluded/economically inactive: Provide help with social skills and implement an ageless, genderless application process.
 - LGBTQI plus: Achieve the LGBT Charter mark.
 - Veterans: Implement a top-down and bottom-up approach, support community groups and organisations, and map local communities to provide information in different languages.
 - Women: Encourage flexibility in roles, offer internships, develop equality strategy and policy, lead by example, promote role models, and highlight the benefits.
- ◆ To help people become more involved in their local community and protect the environment, various suggestions were made. These include talking to people, supporting and promoting community organisations and events, improving transport, and working with existing public and voluntary sector organisations. Some participants mentioned there was nothing SOSE could do to involve them, while others were content with their current involvement.
 - ◆ Specific suggestions for target groups include attending events to break barriers and build confidence, supporting groups and facilities for young adults, setting up radio stations, and promoting local events. Additionally, addressing cultural fears and providing peer support were mentioned as important.
 - ◆ For environmental protection, the most common suggestions were providing information and education on eco-friendly practices, funding or subsidising greener behaviours, and raising awareness. Other actions included monitoring data on local strategies' impact, supporting workplaces to reduce energy use, improving public transport and recycling facilities, supporting local environmental projects and green businesses, and promoting good practice by leading by example.

6.3.4 Figure 1, below summarises the key themes emerging from the consultation and highlights the different ways in which seldom heard groups experience them.



Finance

- the costs of public and private transport were a barrier to accessing employment, training, services and events for all groups but especially the financially excluded
- the financially excluded did not have the option of leaving the region to live and work elsewhere because they lacked the means to move
- a lack of finance prevented business start ups
- women and young people identified low rates of pay as an issue
- the capacity to work fluctuated amongst people living with a chronic condition, but those on benefits faced a rigid earnings threshold



The region's infrastructure:

- lack of affordable housing, transport links and having to travel long distances were commonly mentioned as barriers to living and working in the region
- the costs associated with travelling as a result of this were particularly challenging to young people and the financially excluded
- for veterans starting a new career, the location of Job Centres and the transport links to them from rural areas were barriers



Knowledge:

- knowing what support was available or where to go for help finding a job or starting a business were also commonly reported
- for ethnic minorities, who may not speak English as a first language or at all, this was particularly challenging



Need for flexibility:

- women highlighted the need for flexible working to enable them to manage childcare
- autistic young people described how busy and noisy environments were difficult for them
- people living with a chronic condition were frustrated by the lack of flexibility from employers



Lack of experience:

- lacking the experience needed to get a job was a particular barrier faced by autistic young people and young people with additional support needs. Volunteering was identified as one means through which they could gain volunteering, but this meant that they would have no income and would therefore be unable to live independently
- those at risk of offending behaviour also found it difficult to find an opportunity to gain experience



Expectations and perceptions:

- autistic young people and young people with additional support needs felt that there was a biased view of their capabilities and that their potential contributions were not valued
- deaf and hard of hearing people also described how expectations of them meant that self employment opportunities, for example, were never discussed with them
- LGBTQI+ young people described how perceptions of them made it difficult to access employment - fear of discrimination was common



Communication:

- the lack of BSL interpreters within the region is a significant constraint for deaf and hard of hearing people, and poor connectivity restricts the ability for online communication (i.e. high speed internet connections are needed to ensure accurate use of sign language).
- for minority ethnic groups, where English may not be their first language, all interactions are challenging. These can be compounded by cultural differences.



Mental wellbeing:

- for many participants, the barriers faced and the impact of stigma and discrimination meant that they lacked confidence and self-esteem which in turn acted as a barrier in its own right
- some participants also described how their mental health prevented them from realising their potential.



Lack of amenities:

- all groups felt that there was a general lack of things to do in the area and although this affected everyone's experiences of living in the region, it acted as a barrier to some groups
- a lack of a 'gay' scene made socialising difficult for LGBTQI plus young people
- for ethnic minorities, a social life that wasn't based around pubs was missing
- for young people, there was a perceived need for more shops, restaurants, entertainment, youth groups and places for young people to meet (especially in rural areas)

7. Equality Outcomes

7.0 Overview

7.0.0 Following our analysis of equality evidence and stakeholder engagement, we have identified four equality outcomes that we believe are of the highest relevance to our work and the communities we serve. These outcomes reflect the areas where we have the potential to make a significant difference and where the need for action is most pressing. We acknowledge that there is still much work to be done to achieve full equality, but we are confident that by focusing on these specific outcomes, we can make meaningful progress in the right direction.

7.1 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.

7.1.0 This outcome would include:

- ◆ Increased participation and representation of diverse groups in SOSE's decision-making processes, ensuring that the voices of all community members are heard and valued.
- ◆ The identification and implementation of innovative solutions that address regional challenges and priorities, resulting from the inclusion of diverse viewpoints and experiences.
- ◆ Improved community satisfaction with SOSE's efforts to engage, consult, and include all community members in its work, leading to increased trust and credibility.
- ◆ Enhanced social cohesion and collaboration between various community groups, organisations, and individuals, contributing to a more resilient and supportive regional community.
- ◆ The creation of more equitable opportunities in areas such as enterprise and skills, resulting from a better understanding of the needs and barriers faced by different community members.
- ◆ Demonstrable progress towards achieving regional goals and objectives, such as economic growth and environmental sustainability, as a result of more inclusive and informed decision-making.

7.1.1 We will take these actions to support the achievement of this outcome:


- ◆ **Inclusivity:** Ensure that engagement activities are designed to accommodate diverse groups of people, including those with disabilities, different age groups, and various cultural backgrounds. This can include providing accessible venues, language translation services, and materials in different formats.
- ◆ **Accessibility:** Make information and engagement opportunities easily accessible through various communication channels such as social media, newsletters, local newspapers, and community notice boards. Ensure that online content is user-friendly and mobile-responsive.
- ◆ **Targeted Outreach:** Identify and engage with underrepresented groups directly by partnering with local organisations, community leaders, and influencers that serve these communities. This will help build trust and credibility, making it easier to involve them in engagement activities.
- ◆ **Collaborative Events:** Organise events that bring together different community groups, fostering cross-cultural understanding and promoting a sense of unity. This can include workshops, cultural exchanges, and joint community projects.
- ◆ **Flexible Engagement:** Offer a range of engagement methods and formats, such as online surveys, face-to-face meetings, and virtual focus groups, to accommodate different preferences and schedules.
- ◆ **Feedback Loop:** Communicate the outcomes of the engagement process to participants, demonstrating how their input has been considered and incorporated into decision-making. This will help build trust and encourage ongoing participation.
- ◆ **Capacity Building:** Support community organisations and individuals in developing the skills and resources needed to participate effectively in engagement activities. This can include providing training sessions and funding opportunities.

7.2 Outcome 2

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

7.2.0 This outcome would include:

- ◆ Increased adoption of fair working practices among employers and businesses, ensuring equal opportunities, diversity, and inclusion in the workplace.
- ◆ A supportive business ecosystem that fosters collaboration, knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement of fair working practices.

- 
- ◆ A stronger regional reputation for promoting fair work, attracting businesses and talent that value inclusivity and equity.
 - ◆ Positive social and economic impacts, such as reduced income inequality, lower unemployment rates, and improved community well-being.

7.2.1 We will take these actions to support the achievement of this outcome:


- ◆ **Promote guidelines:** Create a set of fair work guidelines that outline best practices for employers, covering areas such as equal pay, non-discrimination, flexible work arrangements, and employee well-being. Promote these guidelines to businesses in the region and provide resources and support to help them implement the practices.
- ◆ **Offer support:** Promote the provision of support for employers and HR professionals on topics related to fair work, such as diversity and inclusion, and mental health in the workplace. This will help businesses develop their capacity to create more inclusive and equitable work environments.
- ◆ **Networking and collaboration:** Facilitate networking events and collaboration opportunities for businesses to share best practices, learn from each other's experiences, and foster a community of fair work advocates.
- ◆ **Support for small businesses:** Provide tailored support to small businesses and start-ups to help them implement fair working practices from the outset, including access to resources, training, and mentorship programs.
- ◆ **Partner with local organisations:** Collaborate with local organisations and community groups to develop joint initiatives that promote fair working practices.
- ◆ **Monitoring and reporting:** Encourage businesses to monitor their progress on fair work practices and report on their achievements, fostering transparency and accountability. Provide guidance on how to measure and report on these practices effectively.
- ◆ **Public awareness campaign:** Develop a public awareness campaign to promote the importance of fair working practices and their benefits for employees, businesses, and the broader community. This will help create a culture of fairness and inclusivity in the region.
- ◆ **Regular review and improvement:** Continuously evaluate and review the impact of these strategies on promoting fair working practices in the region, and make improvements as needed to ensure ongoing progress.

7.3 Outcome 3

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

7.3.0 This outcome would result in:

- ◆ Enhanced access to information, resources, and opportunities for people with protected characteristics, empowering them to be active participants in the green economy.
- ◆ Increased workforce diversity and inclusion in the green economy, with people with protected characteristics benefitting from new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- ◆ Strengthened social protection systems that effectively support people with protected characteristics during the transition, mitigating potential adverse impacts and ensuring a fair and inclusive net-zero future.
- ◆ Improved accessibility and inclusivity of public services and infrastructure during the transition, ensuring that people with protected characteristics can fully participate in and benefit from the net-zero society.
- ◆ Demonstrable progress towards reducing social and economic inequalities, fostering a more equitable, inclusive, and resilient region as it transitions to a net-zero economy.
- ◆ Inclusive engagement: Ensure that people with protected characteristics are meaningfully involved in the processes related to the net-zero transition. This includes outreach, consultation, and collaboration with various community groups, organisations, and individuals representing diverse interests and perspectives.
- ◆ Accessible information: Provide information about the net-zero transition in accessible formats and languages, ensuring that people with protected characteristics can understand the implications and opportunities presented by the transition.
- ◆ Skills development: Promote education and training programs which will equip individuals with protected characteristics with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in and benefit from the green economy. This includes vocational training, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs in sectors such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture.
- ◆ Financial support: Promote financial support, such as grants, low-interest loans, or subsidies, to help individuals with protected characteristics access new employment and entrepreneurial opportunities in the green economy. This



support can help them overcome barriers to entry, such as a lack of capital or access to resources.


- ◆ **Inclusive recruitment:** Encourage employers in the green economy to adopt inclusive recruitment practices, ensuring that people with protected characteristics have equal opportunities to access jobs in the sector.
- ◆ **Workplace accommodations:** Advocate for and support the implementation of workplace accommodations for people with protected characteristics, ensuring that they can work comfortably and effectively in the green economy. This may include flexible work arrangements, accessibility improvements, or targeted support for employees with specific needs.
- ◆ **Social protection:** Ensure that the promotion of social protection systems, such as support for redundancy, are inclusive and responsive to the needs of people with protected characteristics, helping them navigate the net-zero transition without being disproportionately impacted by job losses, changes or disruptions.
- ◆ **Collaboration:** Foster partnerships between public, private, and non-profit stakeholders to support a just transition for people with protected characteristics, leveraging their expertise, resources, and networks to create a more inclusive and equitable net-zero future.

7.4 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.

7.4.0 This outcome would result in:

- ◆ **Diverse Workforce and Board Representation:** A workforce and board that reflect the diversity of the community, promoting equal opportunities and better decision-making through diverse perspectives.
- ◆ **Inclusive and Supportive Culture:** A workplace culture where all staff feel valued, respected, and empowered, fostering an environment that encourages diversity of thought and mutual trust.
- ◆ **Increased competency:** A well-informed and skilled workforce with a strong understanding of equalities issues, capable of championing inclusivity and addressing biases in their day-to-day work.
- ◆ **Continuous Improvement:** A proactive approach to equalities, with regular assessments of progress and a commitment to refining policies and practices based on data and staff feedback.

- 
- ◆ Recognition: Improved confidence in organisational practices and reputation, as demonstrated by the achievement of external charter marks that validate the organisation's commitment to advancing equality and fostering inclusivity.

7.4.1 We will take these actions to support the achievement of this outcome:

- ◆ Diverse Workforce and Board Representation: Implement targeted recruitment campaigns and review processes to attract and retain diverse staff and board members. Monitor diversity metrics regularly to ensure representation.
- ◆ Inclusive and Supportive Culture: Provide organisation-wide diversity and inclusion training, and establish communication channels for staff to share experiences. Implement policies to address discrimination and celebrate staff diversity.
- ◆ Increased Competency: Offer regular training on equalities issues and unconscious bias for all staff members. Support a network of equality champions to provide guidance and support within the organisation.
- ◆ Continuous Improvement: Regularly review and update policies, procedures, and data analysis to ensure alignment with best practices in equality and diversity. Utilise staff feedback and suggestions to identify actions for enhancing organisational practices.
- ◆ Recognition: Apply for and showcase external charter marks like Level 2 of Disability Confident and the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index. Leverage achievements and recognition to attract diverse talent and improve organisational practices in equality and diversity.

8. Equality and Opportunity in Action

8.0 Youth Advisory Forum

SOSE is taking steps to establish a new Youth Advisory Forum that will help the organisation to be better informed about the challenges that young people face. SOSE is working to build the economy of the future and listening to young people is a key part of that.

The approach has been co-produced with young people themselves and has been sense-checked at various milestones within the development process. As part of the work of the Youth Advisory Forum, members will provide input into key areas, for example Fair Work, Transition to Net Zero, and Natural Capital alongside other areas of focus as detailed in the SOSE Action Plan.

SOSE aims to recruit 16 members from across the South of Scotland, who will provide a good geographical spread of representation during their 2-year terms. They will be provided with opportunities to increase their confidence by working with staff at different levels within the organisation, whilst building a network of professional contacts to help them develop their future careers.

It is hoped that the Youth Advisory Forum will also better prepare the young people to take on decision-making positions (including Board memberships across the South) and encourage them to have a more active role within their local communities.



8.1 The Frangipane Bakery

Case study: Social Enterprise start-up in Berwickshire



Rachel Parker: CEO and Founder of
The Frangipane Bakery

Aim:

To spread joy and support people facing barriers to employment into meaningful work through providing training and baking gluten-free products.

Core Beliefs:

- People who require a gluten-free diet should be able to experience the same joy from food as everyone else.
- Everyone deserves the dignity of a meaningful and worthwhile job regardless of their circumstances or background.

Key Activities:

- Baking**
Delicious gluten free products, hand made in a dedicated gluten-free premises to prevent cross contamination.
- Employability Programme**
Mental health and wellbeing support, bakery skills training, employability support and mentoring.
- Community Programme**
Improving allergen awareness in local hospitality sector and supporting employers in autism acceptance, mental health awareness and disability awareness to shift towards a more inclusive society as a whole.

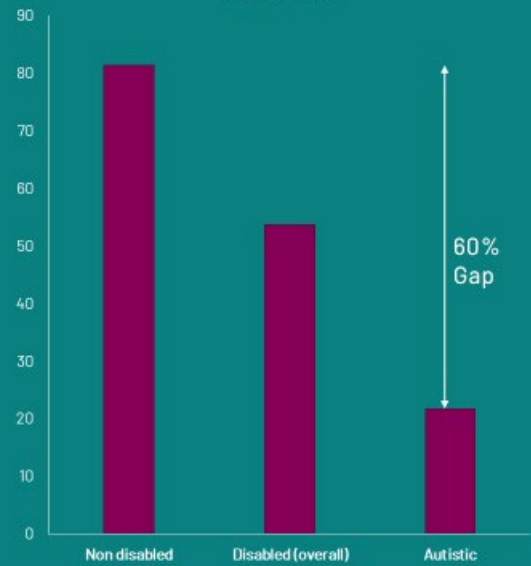
Why?



spread joy through gluten free bakes

&

ONS Outcomes for Disabled People: Employment



close the disability employment gap

The Journey

With support from SOSEs dedicated Youth Led Enterprise Coach and one of SOSEs Business Gateway Advisors, Rachel has been able to:

Secure Premises

Secure Funding

- Innovate UK - Young Innovators Award £5,000
- SBC Barrier Removal Fund £600
- The National Lottery Community Fund - Awards for All ('Untapped Potential' art exhibition in collaboration with Allanbank Arts) £10,000
- IEE City Deal £1,000
- First Port - Start It Award £5,000
- Scottish EDGE - Young EDGE Award £20,000
- Community Led Local Development Fund £15,388

Leverage a Network of Support and Opportunities to the Benefit of her Business

- THRIVE programme delivered by industry experts from SRUC and QMU focused on product development
- Animate - Agents of Change Young Professionals Programme

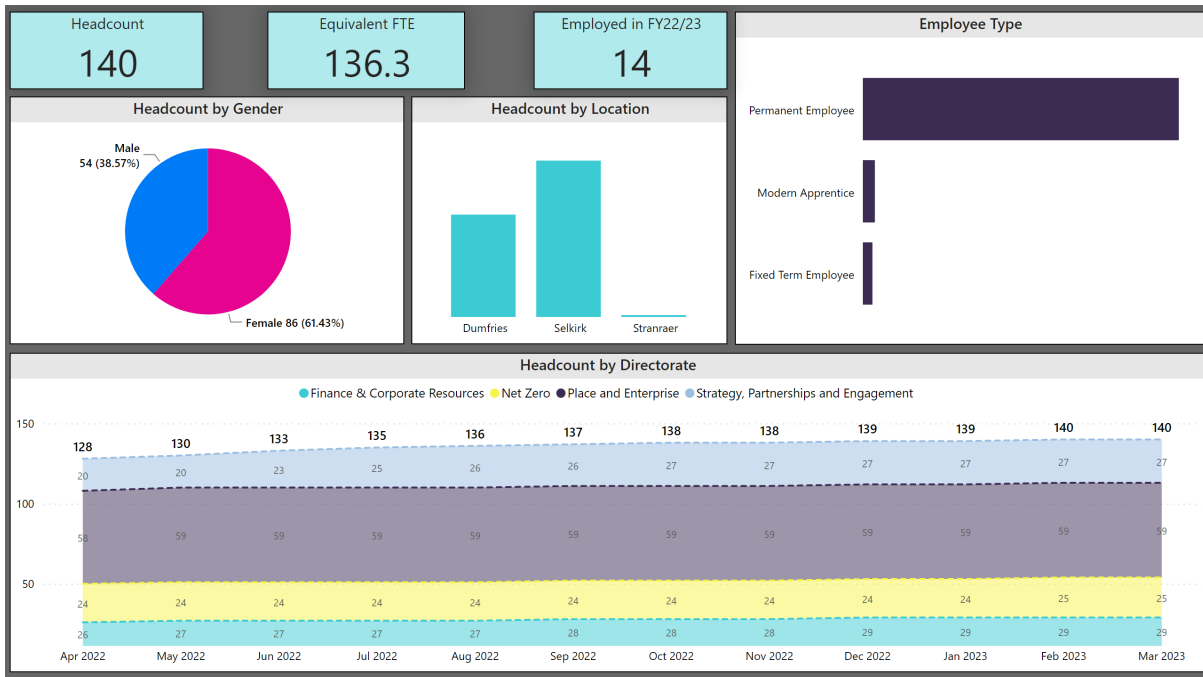
Results?

- The business premises is now fitted out with a new, practical and functional commercial kitchen
- Access to support from Digital Boost
- The Frangipane Bakery has begun trading
- Secured an Access to Work Award and recruited a team of 3 support workers
- Hosted a workshop with local neurodivergent people to map out a vision for neuro-inclusive employment in Berwickshire
- Awards:
 - ✓ Innovate UK Young Innovator Award, 2021
 - ✓ Scottish EDGE Award, 2022, including £20,000 of funding, the largest grant ever awarded to a Young Scottish EDGE winner
 - ✓ Finalist for both Rising Star of the year Award & Food StartUp of the year Award in the 2023 Scotland StartUp Awards

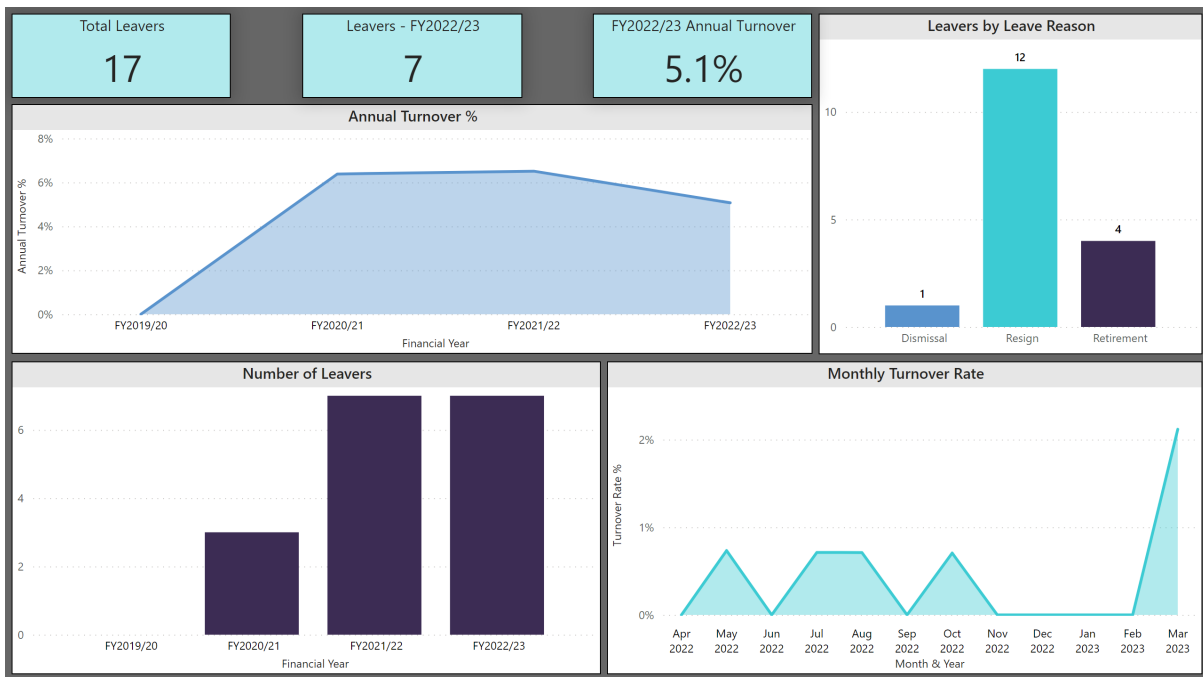
9. Appendices

9.0 Appendix 1: Employee Data

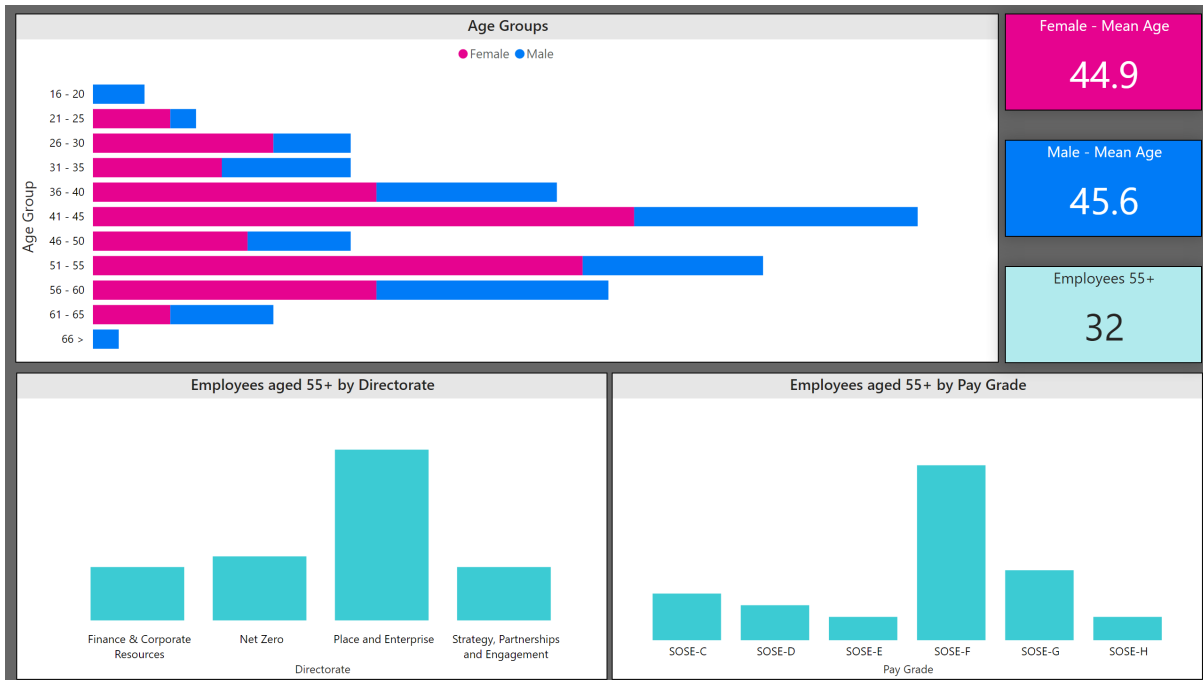
9.0.0 Headcount



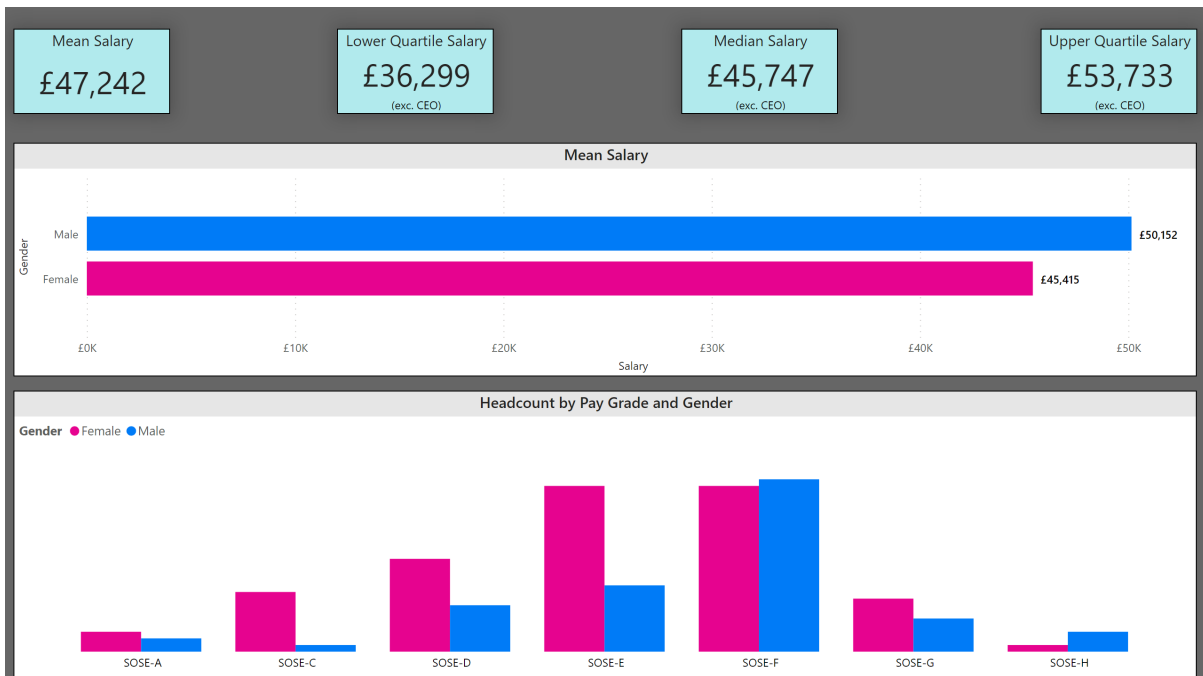
9.0.1 Leavers



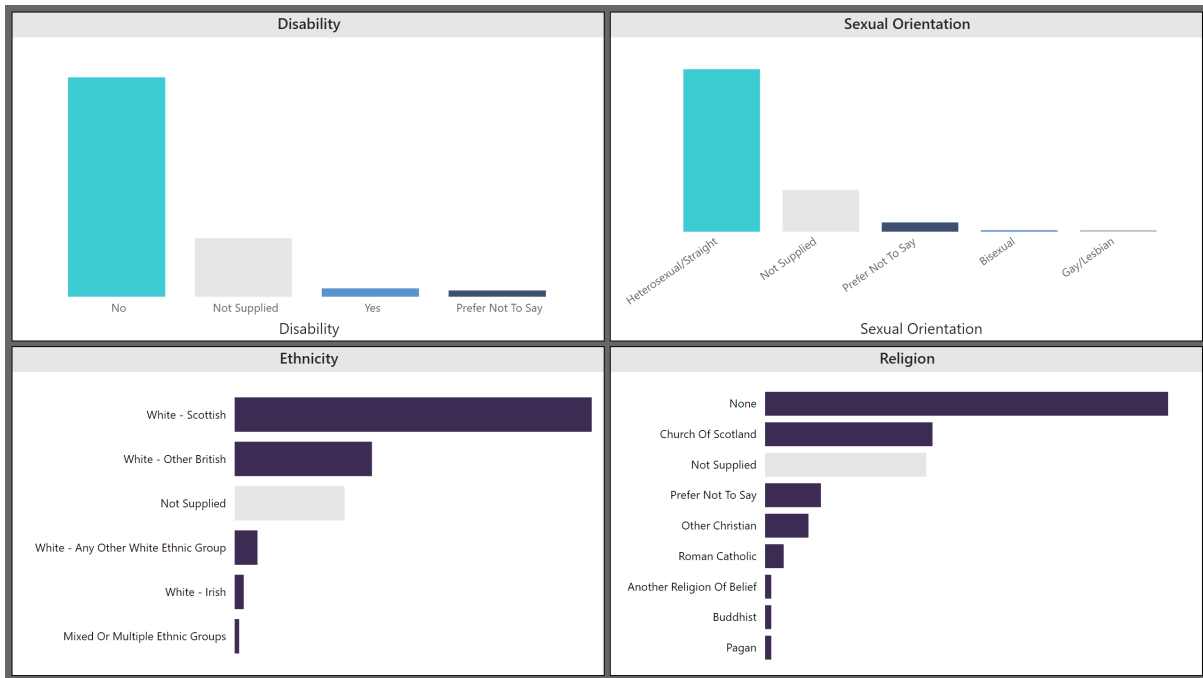
9.0.2 Age



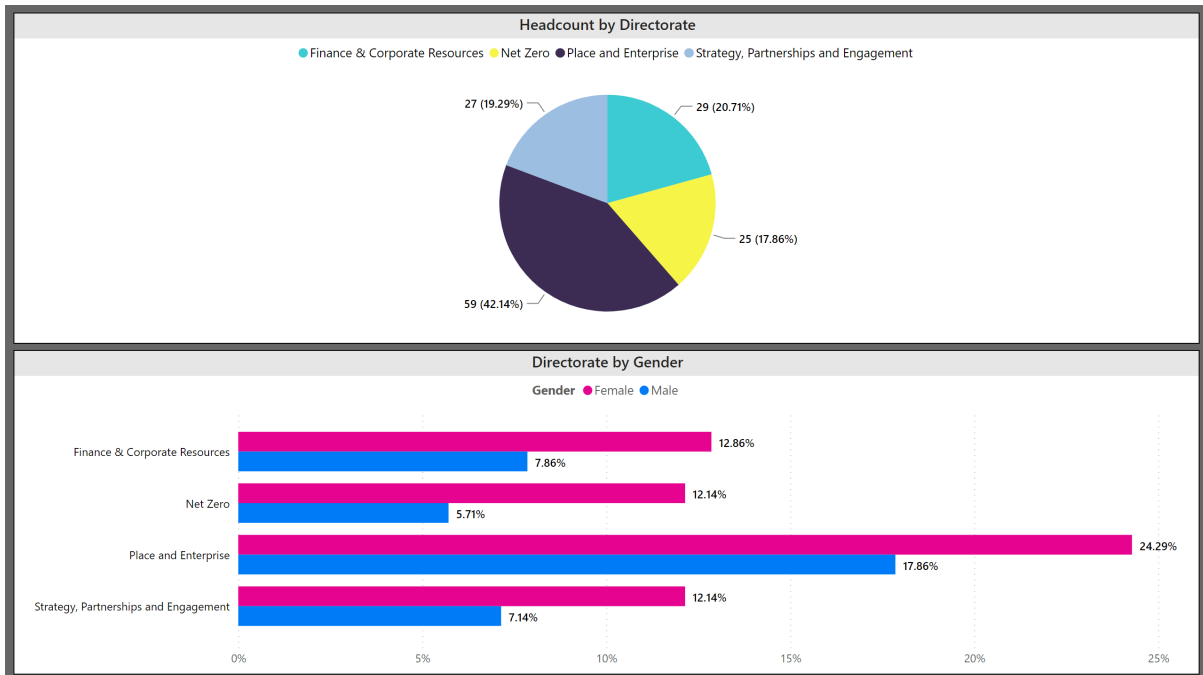
9.0.3 Salary and Grade



9.0.4 Disability, Sexual Orientation, Ethnicity and Religion



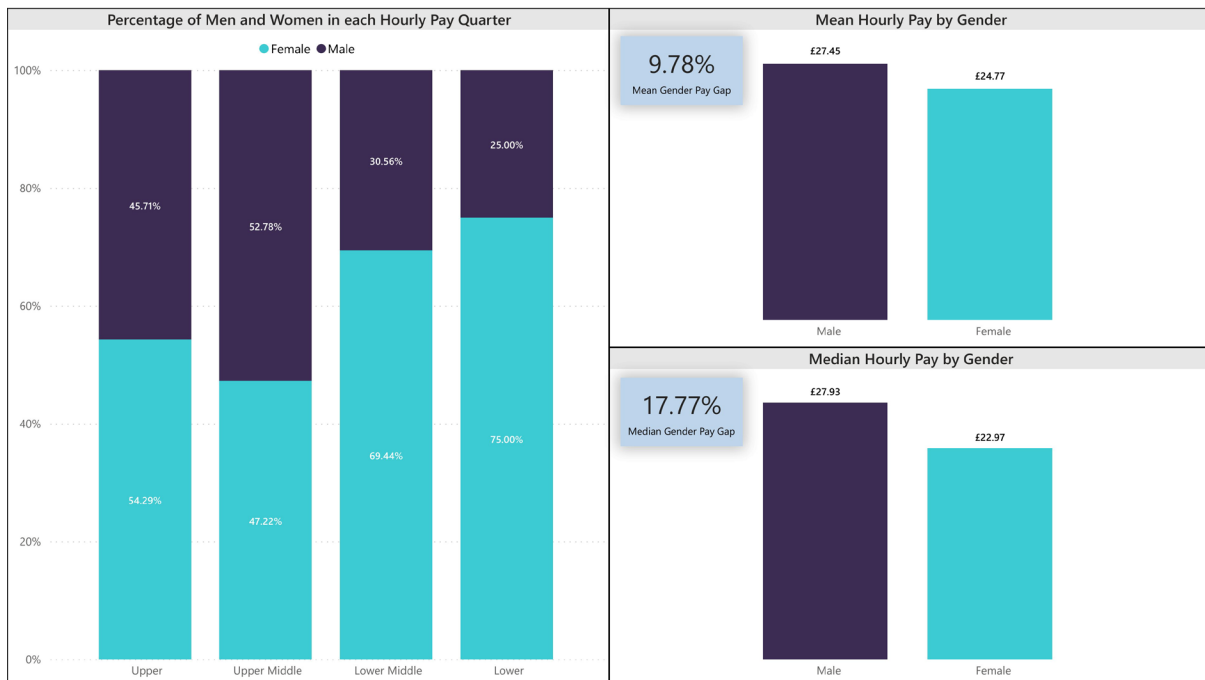
9.0.5 Headcount by Directorate and Gender



9.0.6 Gender by Month and Year



9.0.7 Hourly Pay by Gender



9.1 Appendix 2: Applicant Data

9.1.0 Gender

Gender	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
Female	61.5%	53.5%	-8.1%	55.2%	-6.3%
Male	38.5%	44.3%	+5.8%	42.8%	+4.4%
Not Supplied		0.9%	+0.9%	1.1%	+1.1%
Prefer Not To Say		1.3%	+1.3%	0.9%	+0.9%

9.1.1 Disability

Disabled	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
No	74.8%	89.6%	+14.8%	88.9%	+14.0%
Not Supplied	19.6%	0.9%	-18.7%	1.1%	-18.5%
Prefer Not To Say	2.1%	3.3%	+1.2%	4.3%	+2.2%
Yes	3.5%	6.2%	+2.7%	5.8%	+2.3%

9.1.2 Sexual Orientation

Sexuality	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
Bisexual	0.7%	1.2%	+0.5%	1.1%	+0.4%
Gay/Lesbian	0.7%	2.1%	+1.4%	1.5%	+0.8%
Heterosexual/Straight	74.8%	89.6%	+14.8%	87.4%	+12.5%
Not Supplied	18.9%	0.2%	-18.7%	0.2%	-18.7%
Other		0.7%	+0.7%	0.6%	+0.6%
Prefer Not To Say	4.9%	6.2%	+1.3%	9.2%	+4.3%

9.1.3 Ethnicity

Ethnicity	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
African - Other		0.9%	+0.9%		
African - Scottish/British		0.4%	+0.4%		
Asian - Bangladeshi		0.1%	+0.1%	0.2%	+0.2%
Asian - Chinese		0.3%	+0.3%	0.2%	+0.2%
Asian - Indian		1.0%	+1.0%	0.2%	+0.2%
Asian - Other		0.2%	+0.2%	0.2%	+0.2%
Asian - Pakistani		0.4%	+0.4%		
Caribbean or Black - Black		0.1%	+0.1%		
Caribbean Or Black - Other		0.1%	+0.1%		
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups	0.7%	0.9%	+0.2%	0.9%	+0.2%
Not Supplied	16.8%	0.9%	-15.9%	1.1%	-15.7%
Other - Arab		0.2%	+0.2%	0.4%	+0.4%
Other - Other		0.4%	+0.4%	0.4%	+0.4%
Prefer Not To Say		1.4%	+1.4%	1.1%	+1.1%
White - Irish	1.4%	2.0%	+0.6%	3.0%	+1.6%
White - Other	3.5%	4.1%	+0.6%	3.2%	-0.3%
White - Polish		0.8%	+0.8%	0.6%	+0.6%
White - Scottish/British	77.6%	85.8%	+8.2%	88.4%	+10.8%

9.1.4 Religious Beliefs

Religious Belief	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
Another Religion	0.7%	1.2%	+0.5%	1.3%	+0.6%
Buddhist	0.7%	0.5%	-0.2%	0.6%	-0.1%
Church Of Scotland	18.9%	16.1%	-2.8%	15.4%	-3.5%
Hindu		0.7%	+0.7%	0.2%	+0.2%
Jewish		0.1%	+0.1%	0.2%	+0.2%
Muslim		0.8%	+0.8%	0.9%	+0.9%
None	46.9%	63.0%	+16.1%	64.9%	+18.0%
Not Supplied	18.2%	0.9%	-17.3%	1.1%	-17.1%
Other Christian	4.9%	7.1%	+2.2%	6.4%	+1.5%
Pagan	0.7%	0.1%	-0.6%	0.2%	-0.5%
Prefer Not To Say	7.0%	5.1%	-1.9%	5.8%	-1.2%
Roman Catholic	2.1%	4.2%	+2.1%	3.0%	+0.9%
Sikh		0.1%	+0.1%		

9.1.5 Age

Age Group	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
16 - 20	2.1%	4.5%	+2.4%	5.6%	+3.5%
21 - 25	3.5%	3.9%	+0.4%	3.4%	-0.1%
26 - 30	6.3%	7.2%	+0.9%	5.4%	-0.9%
31 - 35	7.7%	9.5%	+1.8%	9.0%	+1.3%
36 - 40	14.7%	11.8%	-2.9%	11.1%	-3.6%
41 - 45	21.0%	14.5%	-6.5%	13.7%	-7.3%
46 - 50	8.4%	11.7%	+3.3%	11.6%	+3.2%
51 - 55	17.5%	17.1%	-0.3%	17.8%	+0.3%
56 - 60	13.3%	12.2%	-1.0%	15.2%	+1.9%
61 - 65	4.9%	6.5%	+1.6%	7.1%	+2.2%
66 >	0.7%	1.0%	+0.3%	0.2%	-0.5%

Age Group	SOSE Employees	All Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)	Interviewed Applicants	% Difference (versus SOSE Employees)
16 - 20	2.1%	4.5%	+2.4%	5.6%	+3.5%
21 - 25	3.5%	3.9%	+0.4%	3.4%	-0.1%
26 - 30	6.3%	7.2%	+0.9%	5.4%	-0.9%
31 - 35	7.7%	9.5%	+1.8%	9.0%	+1.3%
36 - 40	14.7%	11.8%	-2.9%	11.1%	-3.6%
41 - 45	21.0%	14.5%	-6.5%	13.7%	-7.3%
46 - 50	8.4%	11.7%	+3.3%	11.6%	+3.2%
51 - 55	17.5%	17.1%	-0.3%	17.8%	+0.3%
56 - 60	13.3%	12.2%	-1.0%	15.2%	+1.9%
61 - 65	4.9%	6.5%	+1.6%	7.1%	+2.2%
66 >	0.7%	1.0%	+0.3%	0.2%	-0.5%