

Equality data collection in the Scottish public sector

Summary



Introduction

This document summarises research commissioned by the Scottish Government to improve understanding and share examples of good practice in relation to equality data collection in the Scottish public sector. This work is an output of the Scottish Government's Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP).

Equality data as defined in this research means information held about people with 'protected characteristics': **age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership, plus socio-economic disadvantage** (e.g. people with low incomes or wealth, people who live in a deprived area).

This document summarises:

- Research to improve understanding of equality data collection in the Scottish public sector.
- Six case studies that showcase aspects of good practice in equality data collection in the Scottish public sector.

This document aims to increase understanding of the ways in which public sector organisations have approached collecting and using equality data, and to share examples of good practice. It is hoped that this will contribute to the development of policies and services which help to reduce inequality.



What equality data are collected?

In September 2020, the Scottish Government commissioned research to support its efforts to enhance the availability and quality of equality data. The research explored **what** equality data are collected by Scottish public sector organisations, **why** these data are collected, and **how** these data are collected, used and stored.

Twenty-seven public sector organisations working in a variety of policy areas took part in the research. The method of selection ensured that organisations concerned with structural inequality, and those which are ‘public facing’ in service delivery, were represented.

An examination of 55 datasets held by these organisations showed that:

- Data on **age** and **sex** were collected in almost all cases.
- **Race** and **disability** were collected in most cases.
- **Sexual orientation** and **religion and belief** were collected in more than a third of cases.
- **Marriage and civil partnership** and **gender reassignment** were collected in around a quarter of cases.
- **Pregnancy and maternity** was collected in a minority of cases.
- **Household income** or **other indicators of socio-economic disadvantage** were collected in around a quarter of cases.
- Only **one** data collection contained information about **all** nine protected characteristics.

The data were collected and used to:

- Fulfil statutory obligations.
- Develop, monitor and improve (national and local) policy.
- Develop, deliver, monitor and improve services.



What are the barriers and enablers?

The organisations faced barriers and challenges, but also identified factors that enabled the collection and use of high-quality data.

Barriers

- ✖ **Personal and sensitive nature of data:** people can be reluctant to provide information about their equality characteristics, and may be concerned about discrimination.
- ✖ **Practical and methodological issues:** the social, emotional and/or the physical environment within which data collection takes place is not always conducive to the collection of high-quality data.
- ✖ **Lack of consensus on definitions:** there is inconsistency across the public sector and between partner organisations in relation to terms, definitions, questions and response categories.
- ✖ **Shortcomings in organisational culture:** equality issues and the collection of equality data were not always prioritised or fully understood by senior management and were not consistently embraced beyond meeting legal requirements.

Enablers

- ✓ **Efforts to mainstream equality:** there was no standard approach, but suggestions for progressing this agenda focused on the importance of taking steps to change organisational culture and behaviour.
- ✓ **Clear communication with customers:** customers found it helpful when the organisation provided short explanations written in accessible language of why it was asking for such information and what the information would be used for.
- ✓ **Guidance and networking:** the availability of guidance and participation in relevant networks helped with standardisation and coordination issues and improved the overall quality of their collection and use of equality data.



Good practice case studies (1)

The case studies highlight a range of specific aspects of good practice demonstrated by six of the organisations who participated in the original research. Key points from each case study are summarised below. More detail can be found in the full case studies linked on Page 8.

Highland Council Children's Services

- Put in place processes to improve the collection of equality data about children and young people in nurseries and schools.
- Established an Equalities Improvement Group with a remit to work strategically to reduce inequality among children and young people with protected characteristics.
- Has defined outcomes within its Mainstreaming Equality Report that will require the collection and analysis of high quality equality data – specifically related to attainment and post-school destinations.
- Implemented various interventions to reduce poverty and inequality among children and young people with protected characteristics.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration (SCRA)

- Has an Inclusion and Diversity Steering Group, including senior staff members, that plays an important role in driving the improvement of equality data in the organisation.
- Introduced a case management system that records relevant equality data in a systematic way and allows analysis and reporting to be carried out.
- Uses Census-based categories and definitions for recording equality data to allow comparison with other population-level datasets.
- Is developing guidance and providing training to ensure their staff record good quality equality data within the case management system, and understand the importance of doing so.



Good practice case studies (2)

Skills Development Scotland (SDS)

- Has made it mandatory for apprenticeship applicants to complete an equality monitoring form. The form provides information about how the information will be used, and provides a 'prefer not to say' option for each question.
- Has invested time and resources in training its providers to collect equality data on their behalf, and has linked the completion of equality monitoring forms to the financial reimbursements that providers receive for apprenticeships.
- Sets targets for reducing inequality in apprenticeships and uses the equality data it collects to monitor progress in line with [Scottish Government targets](#).
- Works with partners to explore how to make better use of the equality data it collects, and to better address its targets to reduce inequality in its apprenticeship programme, and in the Scottish workforce.

Social Security Scotland (SSS)

- From 2019, incorporated an equality monitoring and feedback form into its online application process. This must be completed by applicants before an application can be submitted. This form provides a 'prefer not to say' option at every question.
- Routinely analyses benefit applications and awards by equality characteristics to ensure that the organisation's processes do not discriminate against any equality group.
- Investigates the reasons for any variations in application rates and outcomes by equality group, develops targeted interventions to address these variations and carries out ongoing monitoring of the effect of these interventions.
- Ensures sufficient organisational technical and analytical resources are available within the organisation to support the collection and use of equality data, and works with stakeholders to increase the impact of its equality data collections.



Good practice case studies (3)

sportscotland

- Has given priority to equality data collection by making this the responsibility of the strategic planning team, and by re-instating a group with representation from across the organisation that is responsible for coordinating equality work.
- Implemented a standardised approach – using equality monitoring forms – to the collection of equality data across all its surveys and programmes to better understand, measure and monitor the impact of its work.
- Added questions about disability and area deprivation to their annual data collection from sports governing bodies.
- Commissioned a series of equality and sport research projects to update, refresh and grow the equality evidence base.
- Worked in partnership with a range of other organisations and partners to align collection and use of equality data, and published and shared evidence on equality data with those who provided the information and with other stakeholders.

The Open University in Scotland

- Created a new Dean of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) in November 2020, and is establishing a new EDI committee within the university's formal governance structure.
- Was the first university in Scotland to introduce a policy for the ethical use of student data for learning analytics.
- In common with others in the higher education sector in Scotland:
 - Collects information on protected characteristics, and on indicators of socio-economic disadvantage.
 - Collects detailed information about students' disabilities to provide tailored, personalised support for student learning.
 - Draws on the support and best practice guidance available from [Advance HE](#) in developing its collection and use of equality data.
 - Uses equality data in a systematic way to evaluate their teaching and learning systems.



Further information and contact

Authors

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The research and case studies were produced by Jennifer Waterton Consultancy (Jennifer Waterton, Dawn Griesbach and Alison Platts) on behalf of the Scottish Government. The participating organisations reviewed drafts of the case studies.

Further resources

Report on [Understanding Equality Data Collection in the Scottish Public Sector](#).

Case studies: [Highland Council Children's Services](#), [Scottish Children's Reporter Administration](#), [Skills Development Scotland](#), [Social Security Scotland](#), [sportscotland](#), and [The Open University](#).

You can find out more about our Equality Data Improvement Programme on [this webpage](#).

Equality Evidence Finder is [accessible here](#).

You can find more evidence about equality [on the Scottish Government website](#).