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Dear Convener,

Budget 2025-26: Pre-Budget Scrutiny

Thank you for your letter dated 28 June 2024 requesting an update on the Equality Data Improvement Programme and Equality Evidence Strategy to inform your pre-budget scrutiny. I am pleased to provide you with the following information.

Background

As Committee members will be aware, Scotland's latest [Equality Evidence Strategy](#) was published in March 2023 and covers the period up to end-2025. The Equality Data Improvement Programme (EDIP) project board - established in April 2021 – helped to shape the Strategy and continues to provide feedback and to support the delivery of actions.

An Interim Review of the Strategy will be published by end-2024 (Annex A provides brief details of the planned content of Review). As such, this update for the Committee provides an early view of the content that will be covered in more detail in the Interim Review.

Vision and Principles behind Equality Evidence Strategy

The Vision of the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25 focuses on **tackling structural and intersectional inequality of outcomes**, by ensuring Scotland's equality evidence base becomes more **accessible, wide-ranging and robust**. A stronger evidence base will enable the **development and delivery of sound, inclusive policies and services** and enable the **measurement of improvements** in the lives of all of Scotland's people.

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This Vision is underpinned by three principles:

- Principle 1: More robust and comprehensive data and evidence will be gathered on the intersecting characteristics of people in Scotland across a range of outcomes.
- Principle 2: Equality evidence will be made more easily accessible so users will be able to access what they need, when they need it.
- Principle 3: Good practice will be shared and promoted to support increased confidence and competence in the production and use of robust equality evidence.

There was commitment to 45 Actions by Scottish Government and NRS.

Progress Halfway through Strategy Period.

At the halfway point of the current Equality Evidence Strategy, good progress has been seen across the Vision and three Principles. However, direct impact on development and delivery of sound, inclusive policies and services and the measurement of improvements is harder to identify at this point.

The 45 Actions set out in the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-25 are the key mechanisms through which the Strategy is advancing the equality evidence base. Impacts include:

- Establishing processes (e.g. with stakeholders) to enable more equality data collection;
- Enhancing equality data collection / collection of new equality data in existing datasets;
- Commencing new data collection (e.g. a new survey) including one or more equality variables;
- Enhancing analysis of equality data;
- Enhancing reporting or publication of equality data collected.

As of July 2024, of the 45 actions, 14 are already complete and 23 are on course, demonstrating strong commitment to advancing equality evidence across many policy areas. Delays are largely due to: ongoing engagement and agreement with stakeholders prior to the collection or publication of new equality data; finalising robust collection and analytical methods for the data; or competing demands and limited resource. More details can be found in the [EDIP Project Board Meeting Highlight Reports](#) and in the future Interim Report.

Direct impact on development and delivery of sound, inclusive policies and services and the measurement of improvements has not yet been examined in detail. This will be explored in both the Interim Review and a final evaluation of the Strategy.

Principle 1 – Data and Evidence on Intersecting Characteristics - The importance of intersectional evidence and analysis is increasingly being understood across Scottish Government. As data collection across equality characteristics grows, more intersectional analysis can be undertaken. A number of actions aim to consider intersectional analysis as part of their statistical reporting, where sample sizes and resources allow. For instance, the Equality Analysis Team is currently finalising a review of intersectional evidence relating to the experiences of minority ethnic women, which will be published in Autumn 2024. (Relating to Action 21)

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Principle 2 – Equality evidence made more easily accessible – Much of the additional equality evidence being collected will be published in regular government reports (e.g. in annual policy monitoring updates or analytical reports). However, the Equality Evidence Finder is a key tool to make equality data more centrally accessible to analysts, policymakers and the general public. A project plan has been set out to ensure regular maintenance of the current tool, in parallel to user research and development of a refined version of the tool which will advance accessibility, useability, inclusion of intersectional evidence, and automated data updating. (Relating to Action 23)

Principle 3 – Good practice shared - [Published guidance regarding collecting and publishing equality data](#) is regularly updated and promoted to assist in data collection of this type.

Equality Evidence Strategy and Mainstreaming

The Equality Evidence Strategy purposefully aligns with Scottish Government’s wider work to mainstream equality and human rights. As laid out in the Programme for Government, policy teams will consult on and publish a framework to embed equality and human rights across the Scottish Government and the wider public sector including an action plan and toolkit, setting out practical steps to progress this ambition.

Officials in the Mainstreaming Policy Team have worked with key equality and human rights stakeholders to shape this work so far and will continue to do so as we move to formal written consultation on the framework. This work will be supported by enhancing how data is collected and, critically, used, as well as by improvements in how lived experience research is harnessed. This will help to ensure that policies work for those who are disadvantaged because of their intersected protected characteristics in a way that ensures fundamental human rights are protected, respected and fulfilled.

The Scottish Government’s 2023 Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report notes, amongst other things, a need for:

- a. A comprehensive approach to improving data collation and analysis;
- b. Building organisational capability, capacity and culture.

The Equality Evidence Strategy supports both of these elements, in that the Actions are all focused on adding to the evidence base; are undertaken at local policy level by local analysts; and act as a prompt to keep equality activities prioritised.

The next statutory Equality Outcomes and Mainstreaming Report is due to be published in April 2025.

Equality Evidence and Budget Processes

Across the Government, Equality Impact Assessments (EQIAs) and Fairer Scotland assessments are routinely undertaken. These are carefully considered in policy design and influence policy decisions, including budget decisions. More robust and comprehensive data and evidence on equality will support this process.

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To comply with legal duties, the Scottish Government has published an Equality and Fairer Scotland Budget Statement (EFSBS) alongside the Budget since 2009 and will do so again this year, drawing on the best available evidence at the time.

As I indicated to Parliament recently, our approach to equality budgeting will be strengthened further for the 2025-26 Scottish Budget by the publication of the results of our gender budgeting pilot with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

I hope this update is useful for the Committee. More information can be provided if required and, when it is published, the Interim Report for the Equality Evidence Strategy 2023-2025 will be sent on.

Yours sincerely,

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Annex A – Interim Review Project Plan

Interim Review of Equality Evidence Strategy to be published by end-2024 and anticipated to include:

- Summary of current context that EDIP and the Evidence Strategy is currently operating in (covering any changes in roles/responsibilities since the creation of the strategy)
- Summary of overall progress of strategy as a whole, in addition to progress by individual actions (as included in the highlight report)
- Demonstration of achievements since beginning of 2023-25 Equality Evidence Strategy
- Outline of actions to date that are in progress, not yet started, or delayed (RAG) by undertaking a light-touch data audit with lead analysts
- Explanation of any trends or observations seen across the Strategy and Actions
- Insights into other analytical equality activities outside of EDIP happening across SG
- Lessons learnt regarding:
 - a. Key drivers
 - b. Decision-making
 - c. Stakeholder influence
- What next for second half of the Equality Evidence Strategy
 - a. Identify any ‘quick-wins’ in terms of changes or improvements that can be made across the Strategy or individual Actions
 - b. Identify any longer term activities to drive progress across the Strategy. This may include an emphasis on intersectional data and evidence (finding consensus on what this looks like for analysis and policy making)
- Potential for shared learning and establishing a strengthened network of equality characteristic collectors/analysts within SG.

It should be noted that, at this time, there is no intention to add or remove actions into the current Strategy. A full comprehensive equality data audit will be prepared ahead of the next Strategy – similar to that which supported the current version.

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