

The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board

**Public Sector Equality Duty
Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report
April 2025**

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THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD
EQUALITIES MAINSTREAMING REPORT – APRIL 2025

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INTRODUCTION

The Valuation Joint Board

The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board is an independent local government body which was established by The Valuation Joint Boards (Scotland) Order 1995 which took legal operational effect on 1 April 1996. The Board comprises 10 elected members, 8 from The Highland Council and 2 from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. The Board is responsible for appointing the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for the two councils.

The Board has full administrative oversight of the department but does not have operational responsibility for the determination of valuations, bands or electoral registration. These operational matters are for the Assessor and ERO to decide subject to the independent appeal procedures which exist for each area of activity.

Functions of the Assessor and ERO

The Assessor is responsible for valuation for non-domestic rating (The Valuation Roll) and council tax banding (The Council Tax Valuation List), and in his role as ERO, the compilation of the Electoral Register, which is used at all elections.

The primary service functions are the compilation and maintenance of the Valuation Roll, the compilation and maintenance of the Council Tax Valuation List and the preparation and publication of the Register of Electors.

The overall aim of the Department is:

“To discharge fully the Office of Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer in a manner that is exemplary”

There are 208,727 registered electors as at 1 April 2025 in Highland and Western Isles, residing mainly in the 147,203 domestic subjects shown in the Council Tax List. The Valuation Roll has 22,980 entries with a total rateable value of £455,938,331. The Board currently employs 58 members of staff, 52 full and 6 part time, however, there are some vacant posts to be filled, which have not been included in the overall figure of staff above.

The Legal Context – The Equality Act 2010 and the General Equality Duty

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a new equality duty for the public sector which came into force on 5 April 2011. It replaced previous public sector equality duties, namely:

- The Race Equality Duty
- The Disability Equality Duty
- Gender Equality Duty

The Act provides protection from discrimination for people on the grounds of the following characteristics:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender Reassignment
- Pregnancy and Maternity
- Race
- Religion or Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation

Marriage and civil partnerships are also covered by the Public Sector Equality Duty, with regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination in employment.

The General Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010 requires public authorities when carrying out their functions to have due regard to the three needs below to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other prohibited conduct
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

The Equality Act 2010 highlights that advancing equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it
- Encourage persons who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low

The Act also sets out that:

- Meeting different needs includes (among other things) taking steps to take account of disabled people's disabilities
- Fostering good relations means tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups
- Meeting the general equality duty may involve treating some people more favourably than others.

The Specific Equality Duties

In May 2012 the Scottish Government introduced the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 to support the better performance of the public sector equality duty by listed public bodies which includes Valuation Joint Boards. These legal duties include requirements to:

- Report on mainstreaming the equality duty every two years
- Publish equality outcomes and report progress every two years
- Assess and review policies and practices
- Gather and use employee information
- Publish gender pay gap information
- Publish statements on equal pay
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement
- Publish in a manner that is accessible

Analysis of the protected characteristics listed below can be found at the end of this report:

- Analysis of data by sex
- Analysis of data on gender reassignment
- Analysis of data by age
- Analysis of data by disability
- Analysis of data on workforce average salary
- Analysis of data by race
- Analysis of data by pregnancy and maternity
- Analysis of data by sexual orientation
- Analysis of data on religion or belief
- Analysis of data by marriage and civil partnership
- Analysis of data by carer responsibility
- Analysis of job applications received by ethnic origin
- Analysis of job applications received by gender and disability

What is Mainstreaming equality?

The Board is required to report and publish on a cycle of either two or four years on the progress made to make the general equality duty integral to the exercise of its functions, so as to better perform that duty.

Mainstreaming simply means integrating equality into the day-to-day work of the Board – taking equality into everything we do as an employer, and when planning or providing services. In doing so equality becomes part of our structures, behaviours and culture and contributes to continuous improvement and better performance. The three needs of the general equality duty should always be considered when exercising the business functions and processes of the Board, including budget setting and project planning.

Gathering and considering relevant equality data is central to mainstreaming equality. This could mean monitoring service users and service activity with respect to all the

protected characteristics and then analysing outcomes and integrating equality into all of our engagement activities.

It is also important for the Board to take steps to gather annual information on its workforce and on the recruitment, development and retention of its employees with respect to relevant protected characteristics. The Board's mainstreaming report must include (if not published previously) an annual breakdown of the information it has gathered, and details of the progress it has made in gathering, and how this information is used to better perform the general equality duty. Analysis of this information will allow the Board as an employer to identify any gaps in its performance.

Mainstreaming the equality duty is an organisational responsibility, requiring leadership and staff awareness to both promote equality and challenge inappropriate behaviour and practices to achieve success.

Leadership plays an important part in the context of the mainstreaming duty. Senior managers should ensure that clear and consistent messaging about the importance of the public sector equality duty is emphasised to all staff employed by the Board.

Training and awareness raising of equality across the Board will help ensure that equality is considered routinely and that staff recognise the relevance of equality duties in their own roles.

The following equalities mainstreaming and equalities outcomes reports can be found on our website:

- Equalities Mainstreaming Update 2023
- Equalities Mainstreaming Report 2021 - 2025

Highland & Comhairle nan Eilean Siar Equality Profiles

Key information in relation to some of the protected characteristics in both Highland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar is as follows:

| Highland | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar |
|--|---|
| In mid 2021 the population of Highland was 238,060 - the 7 th largest of the 32 local council areas in Scotland. 51% of the population is female, 49% is male. Between 2001 and 2021, the population of Highland has increased by 13.9%. (NRS 2021 Population Estimates) | 49.5% of the population is male and 50.5% female which is comparable to 48.8% male and 51.2% female Scottish profile. (NRS 2021 Population Estimates) |
| In terms of overall size, the 45 to 64 age group was the largest in 2021, with a population of 69,424. In contrast, the 16 to 24 age group was the smallest, with a population of 21,456. In 2021, more females than males lived in Highland in 4 out of 6 age groups. (NRS 2021 Population Estimates) | Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has an aging population with 30.2% under 30 compared with 33.6% under 30 across Scotland. 28.2% of the population are over 60 compared with only 24.8% across Scotland (NRS, 2021 Population Estimates) As at June 2021 the median age in the islands was estimated to be 50.3 years compared to the Scottish average of 42.2 yrs. According to the National Records of Scotland as at 2021 approximately one in four people (27%) living in the |

| | |
|--|---|
| | Outer Hebrides are aged 65 and over, in comparison to the Scottish average of 20%. The population continues to age with 15% of the population aged under 16 (17% nationally) and 58% of the population aged 16-64 (64% nationally) while 27% are aged 65 and over (20% nationally). |
|--|---|

Pertinence and proportionality

The process of preparing equality outcomes requires to understand the most significant equality issues arising in the organisation and sector. Efforts and resources require to be targeted as effectively as possible to meet the equality duties. Setting outcomes should focus on the areas where the organisation can have the most impact taking a strategic overview of the organisation as a whole and its functions.

Partnership and working with others

The Joint Board does not operate in a vacuum albeit that its remit has a very narrow, wholly statutory nature. It is important to recognise that its functions are restricted but also that the impact of its functions are fundamental – the franchise and taxation.

Quite apart from the assistance gained in addressing the Board's equalities duties that is received by utilising specialist skills in the lead authority, the billing activities of the constituent councils are a continuation of the valuation and banding process and require close co-operation. This same holds true of the Returning Officer function where the year-round activity of registration forms the bedrock of the large but short-lived organisation that comes into existence when there is a major polling event.

The department is one of a number of Boards and liaison with other Assessors and EROs as to experiences and developments in the field is plainly pertinent. In the field of electoral registration, the involvement of the Electoral Commission through their research, monitoring and more specific duties is also of great importance.

The full realisation of equality outcomes requires that the wider environment be kept in mind and that the complex interactions that can arise are not permitted to act counter to individual initiatives.

The many organisations which seek to advance the interests of those with protected characteristics are also viewed as partners with a particularly important role to play in providing feedback as to performance.

A separate body of information particularly relevant to the department's functions is to be found in the work of the Electoral Commission which since its creation has engaged in much research in the electoral field. In particular there is research suggesting differential levels of registration and attitudes amongst ethnic groups, between age groups and other demographic and economic characteristics.

It is clear that even if the equalities legislation did not apply to electoral registration there would be many issues arising in registration that demand attention under the terms of the legislation that requires the ERO to engage in delivery of registration activities to maintain accurate and complete registers.

At a general level therefore, there is a confluence of issues arising out of equalities work and electoral registration duties that acts as a clear pointer as to actions that may be required.

The strategic position

The Board's strategic position can be summed up as follows:

- The electoral registration function has been extremely busy since the last report in 2023. This has been as a result of Election Act change implementation and the snap UK Parliamentary election (UKPGE) held in July 2024. This election not only incorporated Election Act changes but involved changes in the UK Parliamentary constituencies. This led to the Electoral Registration Officer working with the two constituent authorities (Highland and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) and Argyll & Bute and Moray Councils. The election saw an increase in postal voters for this election.
- As of 1 April 2025, there were 208,727 electors registered to vote. Seven by-elections were held between 28 September 2023 and 21 November 2024. Six were held within The Highland Council area with one being held in the Western Isles area.
- Staff attended the Highland Youth Parliament conference on 10 June 2023 to encourage voter registration for those under the age of 18. Due to the UK Parliamentary General Election in July 2024, it was not possible to attend the conference in 2024. Staff also attended University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) fresher's week events across Highland and Western Isles to encourage student electoral registration. Returning Officer staff from Highland Council and ERO staff attended the Black Isle agricultural show on 1 August 2024 to encourage electoral registration.
- During the annual canvass in 2023, Voter ID leaflets were sent to all households in Highland and Western Isles to promote the need for ID at UK elections. A new online postal and proxy service went live on 31 October 2023. The 15 year rule for Overseas electors was abolished on 15 January 2024. This effectively means votes for life for overseas electors.
- Valuation staff continue to work to dispose of 2023 Revaluation Proposals with decision notices requiring to be issued no later than 30 September 2025. A number of appeal cases have been listed for hearing before the Local Taxation Chamber of the Scottish Courts and Tribunal Service. The legacy 2017 running roll appeals have now been concluded. Work on the second year of the audit of self-catering units is continuing, with a large number of subjects requiring

transfer to the Council Tax Valuation List. Preparatory work for the 2026 rating revaluation is underway.

- The Council Tax regime continues to be a stable function, with new entries in the Council Tax Valuation List continuing to be made in respect of newly completed dwellings and transfers from the Valuation Roll for former self-catering subjects. These transfers are resulting in higher than usual numbers of Council Tax proposals. Council Tax banding cases listed for hearing by the Local Taxation Chamber are dealt with as they arise.
- As far as the Board's role as an employer is concerned, recent staff restructuring has seen the department employing a number of new valuation and clerical staff resulting in a small increase in staff numbers.
- Following recent retirements and continued staff turnover, a number of vacancies are due to be advertised. Whilst it has become difficult to recruit staff at all levels within the organisation, this change from previous years allows the Assessor and Electoral Registration Officer the opportunity to affect change through recruitment channels which were not available previously due to long service of employees.

Training

The Board's lead constituent authority provides training through an online platform and offers an Equal Opportunities and Diversity training course. All new staff are asked to undertake this training course with permanent staff having also completed it.

Our induction document contains information on equalities and highlights that employees of the Board must make certain that they play their part in ensuring that equality becomes part of the Board's structure, behaviour and culture.

Policy and Procedures

The Board has a number of policies and procedures in place, many of which are aimed at eliminating discrimination and promoting equality, some of which are listed below:

- Bullying and Harassment
- Code of Conduct for employees
- Complaints Handling Procedure
- Disciplinary Procedure
- Employee Review and Development Policy
- Equal Opportunity Policy
- Exit Interviews
- Flexi-time Scheme
- Flexible Retirement Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- General Statement of Health, Safety & Wellbeing
- Grievance Procedure
- Guidance on supporting staff going through the menopause

- ICT Acceptable Use Policy
- Job Share Policy
- Lone Working Policy
- Managing Stress at Work Policy
- Maternity, Adoption and Parental Leave Policy
- Mental Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace Policy
- Ordinary Parental Leave and time off for dependents
- Policy and Guidance for Preventing Violence at Work
- Recruitment and Selection Policy
- Special Leave Policy
- Travel and Subsistence Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy

The Board is satisfied that the above Policies and Procedures are non-discriminatory and meet the Board's Equality Duties. These Policies and Procedures are regularly reviewed and updated with new policies developed as required, with support from The Highland Council.

Recruitment and Selection

The Board operates a policy to ensure that recruitment and selection is undertaken within a framework which is fair, consistent, avoids discriminatory practices and provides equal access to all jobs. Equalities questionnaire information is not made available to interview panels.

Service Plan

The Board has a 3-year strategic Service Plan, of which equalities forms an important part. Updates are carried out annually and a copy of the Service Plan is available to all staff via a shared electronic library.

Scottish Assessors' Association

The Assessor chairs the Governance Committee of the Scottish Assessors' Association (SAA) with the Depute Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer and Depute Electoral Registration Officer & Business Manager attending meetings. Equality issues is a standing item on the agenda of its regular meetings.

The SAA was instituted in 1886 and is a voluntary organisation where all Assessors and senior staff are members. One of the functions of the Association is to facilitate consistency of approach in the administration of rating, council tax and electoral registration functions throughout Scotland.

Procurement

Regulation 9 of the Equality Act (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 imposes a duty on public bodies when they consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement, to have due regard to whether the award criteria should

include considerations which will help it meet its Equality Duty. Any award should be related to and proportionate to the subject matter of the proposed agreement.

The Board enters very few procurement contracts directly. Any contracts are procured through a joint framework with Councils, via the Public Contracts (Scotland) website or the Crown Commercial Services Framework. When awarding contracts, the Board would follow all procedures as set out in their Contract Standing Orders and the Procurement (Scotland) Regulations 2016.

Equality Outcomes

Outcome One

People feel involved and are able to participate in public life and influence decision-making

This will require a number of measures to track progress which are provisionally as follows:

- Number on the register relative to population estimates
- Number of responders to household enquiry forms and invitations to register throughout the year and during the annual canvass as a proportion of the total number of households
- Number of corrections and complaints
- The existence of a comprehensive publicity engagement strategy to ensure eligible people are able to participate in the electoral process
- Meeting the Electoral Commission's Performance Standards for EROs in terms of identification of those not registered, including hard to reach groups
- Ensure all properties that should be taxed are included in the Valuation Roll and Council Tax Valuation List.

Outcome progress to April 2025

The Representation of the People (Annual Canvass) Amendment (Scotland) Order 2020 amended the provision in respect of the steps which a registration officer must take for the purposes of complying with his duty to maintain the register of local government electors. This change in legislation allows the ERO to carry out a more tailored annual canvass to take into account local circumstances and to carry out household matches against local data sets. Electronic communications and telephone canvassing are now an option which allows the ERO to reach out to households more directly than sending a form to the current or present occupier.

The ERO's doorstep canvassing duties are continuing in order to encourage non-responders of invitations to register to complete application forms.

The ERO has relatively few clerical errors and handles a small number of complaints on an annual basis. In 2021 the Board approved the Model Complaints Procedure and staff were issued with the relevant guidance documentation. Annual and quarterly complaints reports are published on the Board's website.

Public engagement work is carried out throughout the year especially during the annual canvass of electors and in the lead up to elections. In the run up to the 2024 UK Parliamentary general election information flyers were included with correspondence issued to electors to encourage them to take action to meet key deadline dates for registration, to apply for a postal vote and the need for Voter ID. Voter ID and Register to Vote posters were circulated to GPs and NHS sites, Police media team, all local student accommodation, Citizens Advice Bureau offices, and all secondary and primary schools in Highland & Western Isles.

Young voters under 18 have been encouraged to register to vote via ERO staff attendance at UHI Jobs and Volunteering Fairs, Highland Youth Parliament annual conferences, and participation in the Electoral Commission's annual Welcome to Your Vote Week events.

The ERO has worked alongside partners and constituent authorities to encourage registration from newly enfranchised citizens, and activities included work with resettlement officers from the constituent councils, provision of information flyers at UHI fairs, and improved information held on the ERO's website following a comprehensive overhaul.

Loca data sets are monitored to identify low levels of registration in certain areas and information posters have been sent to community centres in those areas as appropriate.

As part of the website overhaul, accessibility is now much improved with detailed information provided in relation to the need for Voter ID at UK Parliamentary elections and other changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022, as well other information on the right to vote, registering to vote, and how to vote. Videos provided by the Electoral Commission, a number of which consist of guidance in British Sign Language format, have been incorporated. QR codes are now widely used including on the website and various electoral registration forms.

Efforts by the SAA working group responsible for finalising incorporation of KPIs into the Performance Standards set by the Electoral Commission were hampered by implementation of Elections Act changes. It is anticipated that work will commence in the coming months.

Outcome 1 priorities – April 2025 onwards

Work will continue on these outcomes throughout the next two years. The ERO will progress the following:

- Continuing to encourage young voters under 18 to register to vote, working alongside constituent authorities to obtain relevant data. This will continue to be done with appropriate partners such as schools, local colleges and Highland Youth Parliament
- Continuing to work alongside partners and constituent authorities to encourage registration from newly enfranchised citizens

- Continuing to monitor local data sets to identify low levels of registration in particular areas, including revisiting care homes
- Finalise the incorporation of KPIs into the Performance Standards set by the Electoral Commission and continue work in public engagement throughout the year
- Continue to raise awareness of changes brought in by the Elections Act 2022
- Carry out a review of statistical progress reports in relation to maintenance of the Valuation Roll and Council Tax Valuation List to better ensure that all property that should be taxed is included.

Outcome 2

We will improve customer satisfaction rates in particular from people with protected characteristics

In order to track this outcome the following will be required:

- We aim to establish a public performance survey via sampling of transactions with the department
- We will monitor performance more generally via partners' survey work, such as Electoral Commission research, The Highland Council research, close monitoring of complaints, and analysis of the electoral errors that come to light
- Focus on improved materials using plain English tested with relevant groups and in partnership with other EROs and the Electoral Commission
- Through continued use of interactive voter registration throughout the annual canvass of electors, giving the opportunity for household replies to be made via internet, SMS, telephone or by paper return where a response is required.

Outcome progress to April 2025

Work priorities in relation to introduction of Elections Act changes and changes to the proposals/appeals regime along with the introduction of an annual self-catering audit have hampered efforts by the Assessor to incorporate public performance questionnaires. It is anticipated that work will commence in the coming months and that the Board will be in a position to report on progress in 2027.

Complaints reports are published on the Assessor's website, and where action is required in relation to issues arising from complaints received, this is taken as appropriate in order to improve our service. Where electoral errors occurred, these were analysed and staff training provided as required.

The Board previously introduced tablets for doorstep canvassing within Highland and Western Isles which have continued to be popular with canvassing staff and electors. Information is in real time and allows for online registration via the UK Government's digital service to be made on the doorstep, reducing the need for a paper form to be completed. Real time information captured is downloaded directly into the electoral management system (EMS).

Feedback surveys from the 2022 and 2023 annual canvass of electors through the interactive response service were analysed to see how the ERO could improve the

user experience. Feedback from use of the interactive solution was provided to the electoral management software supplier providing this service. Whilst there was no analysis of feedback in 2024 due to the UKPGE, it is anticipated that analysis of feedback surveys will recommence in 2025.

The Board has continued to review standard template letters to ensure they are in plain English, with the majority of the focus to date being on electoral registration templates. Following review, the Board's website has been updated to make it as user friendly as possible and Google Analytics reporting has been set up to identify the average time that a user spends on each page. Any other useful information gathered will assist with future web improvements.

Outcome 2 priorities – April 2025 onwards

The Board will continue to review standard template letters to ensure that they are in plain English. Whilst the existing Board website has been overhauled as far as it can be within the constraints of being hosted by The Highland Council, in the interests of control and further improvement it is considered preferable to create a new standalone dedicated Board website. Work on this is anticipated to commence in 2025.

The feedback survey from the 2025 annual canvass of electors through the interactive response service will be analysed prior to the 2026 canvass to see how the ERO can improve the user experience.

The ERO will continue to work with local partners to encourage registration from newly enfranchised electors using resources from the Electoral Commission. This will be done as part of performance standards for EROs and monitored through KPIs.

Outcome 3

Increase the proportion of staff who feel they are treated fairly

In order to track this outcome we shall require the following:

- Carry out annual employee review and development plans
- Introduce an improved induction programme for new employees
- Carry out a systematic review of HR policies
- Introduce a number of Health & Safety policies and procedures
- Promote flexible working arrangements to support employees to achieve a balance between work and their life outside work
- Ensuring reasonable adjustments are made for disabled candidates and employees
- Increase training in equalities matters for staff at each of the department's offices
- Increase commitment to training where there is an identified need for the organisation to improve the skills of staff
- Reduce occupational segregation where this contributes to an equal pay gap and generally seek to reduce the gender pay gap
- Gather more comprehensive employment data

- Continued commitment to the Scottish Living Wage
- Review recruitment channels.

Adopting these outcomes will require that a revised Equalities Plan be prepared that sets out in greater detail the steps that will require to be taken to advance towards these outcomes. It may also be necessary to modify some of the measures that are proposed.

Outcome progress to April 2025

The Board has seen a high turnover of staff since the publication of the outcomes report in 2023. This has been partly due to retirements but also changes in priorities as a result of recent legislative changes. However, a management team restructure in 2023 has seen the department employing a number of new senior valuation staff. Steps have been taken to work with our lead constituent authority to make jobs more attractive to candidates and to look at progression for staff within the organisation through training.

A training coordinator has been appointed to oversee and progress staff training.

A schedule of health and safety policies and procedures is in place and regularly reviewed with updated reports being presented to the Board as and when updated or required. In addition, a new Health and Safety working group has been established to oversee and progress all such matters.

A new induction document was rolled out in 2023 and has been subsequently reviewed and updated in 2024.

The Board registered as a Disability Confident Committed employer in March 2025.

Whilst there has been an increase in the gender pay gap across the combined and full-time gap for male and female employees, there has been a reduction in the part-time gap. The overall ratio of male/female employees is now more balanced.

Vacancies continue to be advertised through Myjobscotland via The Highland Council's recruitment page with applicants directed to the Board's own website for application packs. Discussions have taken place with The Highland Council to have a separate page for the Board so that we can move to an integrated system and it is anticipated that this will be in place in 2025.

All staff have undertaken the Equal Opportunities and Diversity training through The Highland Council's online training facility.

The Valuation Joint Board promotes career progression schemes and currently has four graduate trainee valuers on such a scheme.

The Board continues to be committed to paying the Scottish Living Wage and salaries are regularly reviewed and changes implemented as required.

A Salary Sacrifice Shared Cost AVC scheme was introduced in 2023.

The Covid-19 pandemic had seen staff largely working from home since March 2020. Staff welfare is a key concern for the Board and regular meetings are held between staff and line managers. Staff have returned to the office in significant numbers and a team has been established in April 2025 to progress formalisation of hybrid working arrangements.

The Board has two members of staff trained to act as Mental Health Representatives (MHRs) for the organisation. The MHRs continue to signpost staff to help and resources available to them or provide a listening ear when staff are facing any kind of work or personal difficulties as required.

As previously reported, Assessor's staff have worked with colleagues from the lead constituent authority, The Highland Council, to update the way all equalities data is collected, including other protected characteristics through staff questionnaires and recruitment monitoring. The Board is now able to report on data with more meaningful analysis (Appendix 2 refers). The data now requested from current employees matches the Census 2022 categories. Our application form has been updated to expand equalities information collected from applicants and is reported in a new Appendix 4.

Outcome 3 priorities – April 2025 onwards

The Board will review work experience opportunities and the under-representation of younger people particularly those under the age of 30. A new dedicated equalities outcome is now therefore established to focus on the issue of maximising opportunities for young people to enter the workforce.

Recruitment and Selection training will be provided to those staff involved in conducting interviews in order to enhance the overall hiring process. By equipping recruiters with the necessary skills and knowledge, the organisation can improve the quality of the staff hired and foster a more inclusive workplace.

Following the Board's registration as a Disability Confident Committed employer in March 2025, all future staff job adverts will be revised in order to better promote opportunities for disabled persons and work will take place to ensure the Board meets its Disability Confident commitments.

The employee review and development plan process is currently being finalised following review, and whilst implementation has been delayed due to the management restructure, it is anticipated to be fully implemented in 2025.

HR and health & safety policies will continue to be monitored and updated where necessary throughout the next two years.

New Equality Outcome 4

Maximise opportunities for young people to enter the workforce

This will require a number of measures to track progress which are provisionally as follows:

- Annual workforce monitoring
- Work with partners and constituent education authorities to explore and promote job, apprenticeship, and work experience opportunities for under 30-year-olds, including attendance at Fresher's Fayres, jobs fairs etc
- Review recruitment advertising media and methods, including potential use of QR codes and more dynamic job advertising material
- Promote career progression opportunities to encourage young people to join the service

The Board as an employer

As an employer, the Board is committed to providing equality of opportunity in employment. No job applicant or employee will receive less favourable treatment because of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. Our working culture aims to promote dignity and to respect the contributions of all. Employees are expected to behave in a manner that reflects our commitment to fair treatment and respect.

Staff are supported to achieve these aims through policies, management guidance and a range of training and awareness activities. Relevant policies include Equal Opportunities, Flexible Working, Grievance and Harassment, Maternity, Paternity and Adoption, Attendance Management, Customer Contact – Unacceptable Actions, and Recruitment and Selection.

Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2016 there is a requirement to publish an equal pay statement and to publish information as to the characteristics/demographics of the Board's employees and the gender pay gap which can be found in Appendices 1 to 3. Appendix 4 is a new addition which for years 2023 and 2024 shows the breakdown of numbers of applicants for each post by ethnic origin, gender and disability, including the successful candidates.

Reporting

The Board is required annually to report and publish information on equalities matters. It is intended to accommodate this requirement by including a section in the Board's website.

Conclusion

The Board will continue to support the Assessor & ERO in mainstreaming equalities throughout the service and monitor progress in relation to the protected characteristics and the equality outcomes identified in this report.

HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

EQUAL PAY STATEMENT

1. The Highland & Western Isles Valuation Joint Board is committed to the principle of equal pay for all its employees and aims to identify and eliminate any bias in its pay systems relating to any of the protected characteristics defined in the Equalities Act 2017 (the Board recognises the specific duty relating to gender, disability and ethnicity).
2. It is in the interest of the Board to ensure that it has fair and just pay systems. It is important that employees have confidence in the process of eliminating bias and the Board is committed to achieving this through consultation with employees and the recognised trade unions.
3. The Board believes that in eliminating bias in its pay systems, it is sending a positive message to its employees and the Highland/Western Isles Communities. It makes good business sense to have fair and transparent reward systems and it also helps the Board to control costs.
4. The Board recognises that occupational segregation in the workforce may have a negative effect on equal pay gaps. The Board is committed to monitoring and analysing areas of occupational segregation and implementing actions to address these.
5. Previous analysis of pay data suggests that the greater availability of part time work in senior grades could have a positive impact on pay gaps. The Board is committed to taking action to achieve this.
6. The Board's objectives are to:
 - Monitor gender pay gaps, occupational segregation and the availability of part time and flexible working arrangements
 - Identify and eliminate any unfair, unjust or unlawful practices that impact on pay
 - Take appropriate remedial action
7. The Board will:
 - Operate a pay strategy for Scottish Joint Council (SJC) employees that ensures equal pay for work of equal value and conditions of employment
 - Operate a Flexible Working Policy that opens opportunities to all employees through the pay grades

- Challenge expectations that employees in higher grades should work long or unpredictable hours
- Appoint on merit, properly assessing the abilities of candidates for recruitment and promotion
- Make reasonable adjustments to support employees to undertake work at higher grades
- Provide support and training to both female and male employees returning to work
- Maintain a culture that challenges stereotypes around an employee's ability to carry out work at higher grades
- Respond to grievances and complaints to the Board on equal pay
- Consult and plan actions in consultation with employees and Trade Unions
- Review progress every two years

Frank W Finlayson
 Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer
 Moray House
 16-18 Bank Street
 INVERNESS
 IV1 1QY

30 April 2025

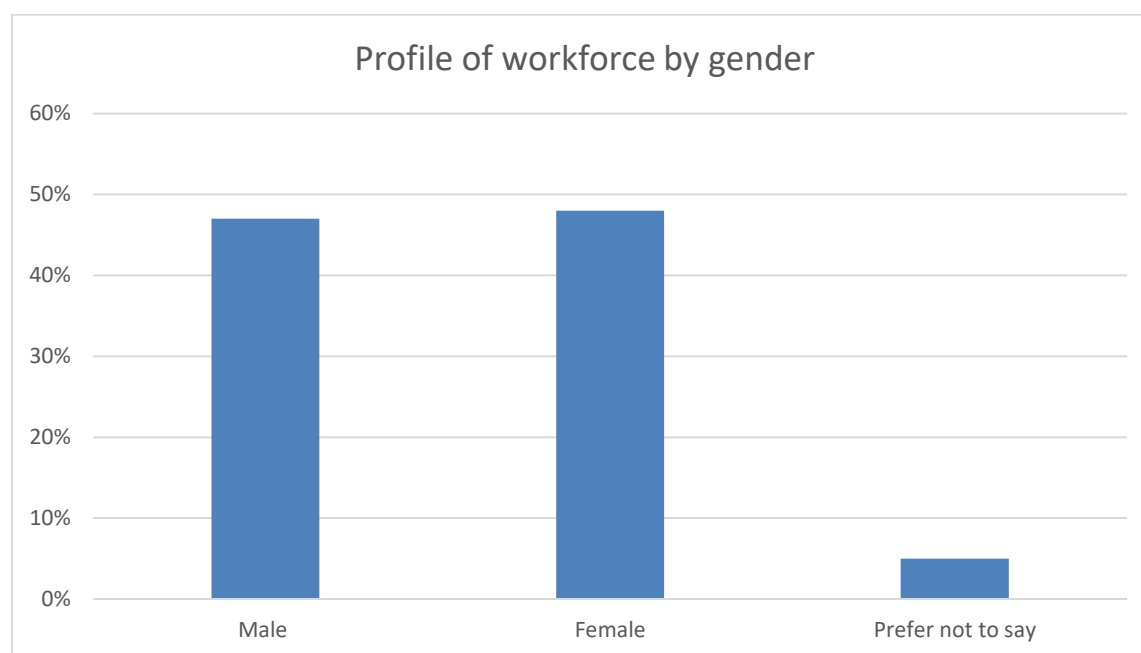
THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

EQUALITIES MONITORING AS AT 1 APRIL 2025

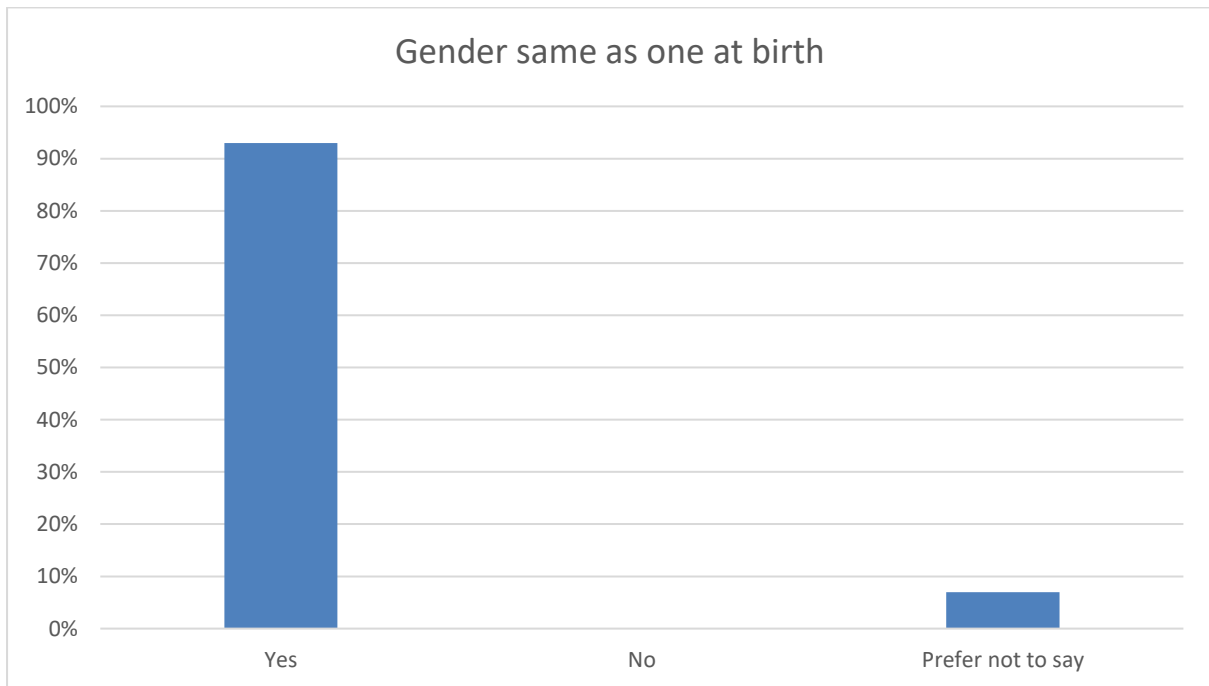
Data collected from our monitoring survey form which was circulated to staff in March 2025 was used to populate information in the following pages. All members of staff were asked to complete the monitoring survey, however there was no requirement to complete all or any of the sections of the survey form. The workforce composition stats (with the exception of average salary and gender pay gap information) does not include information from those who did not wish to disclose information.

Profile of workforce by gender

| Male | Female | Prefer not to say |
|------|--------|-------------------|
| 47% | 48% | 5% |

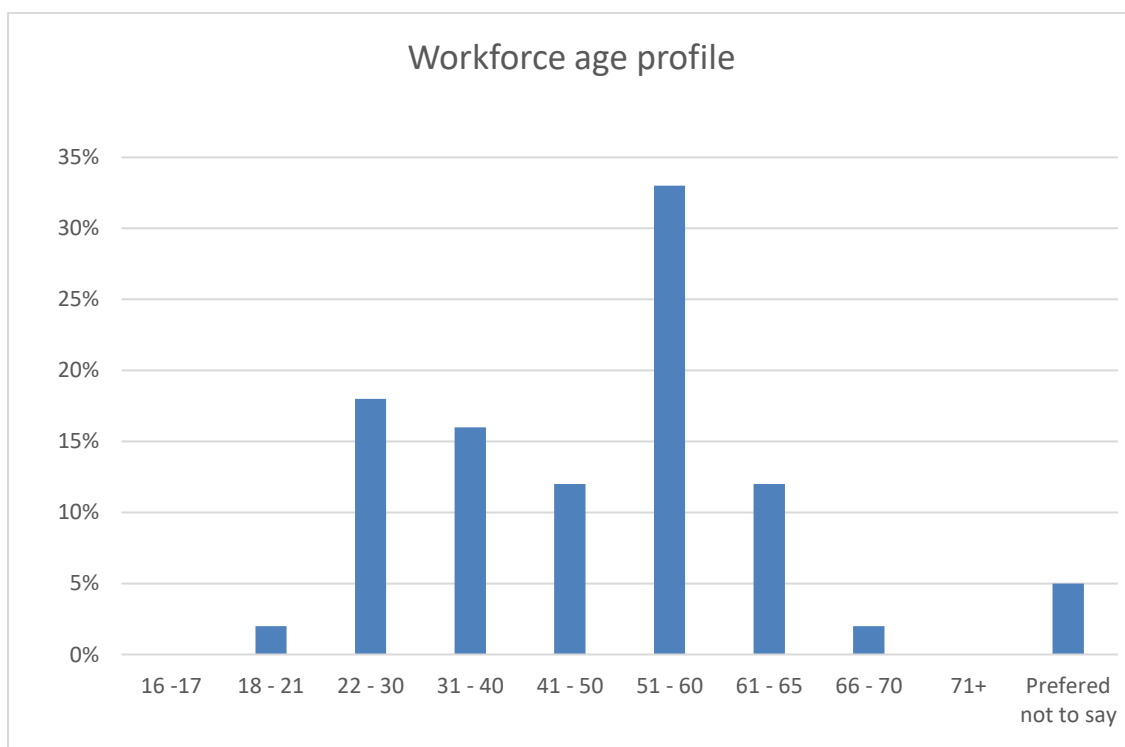


| Is gender same as one at birth? | Employees |
|---------------------------------|-----------|
| Yes | 93% |
| No | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 7% |



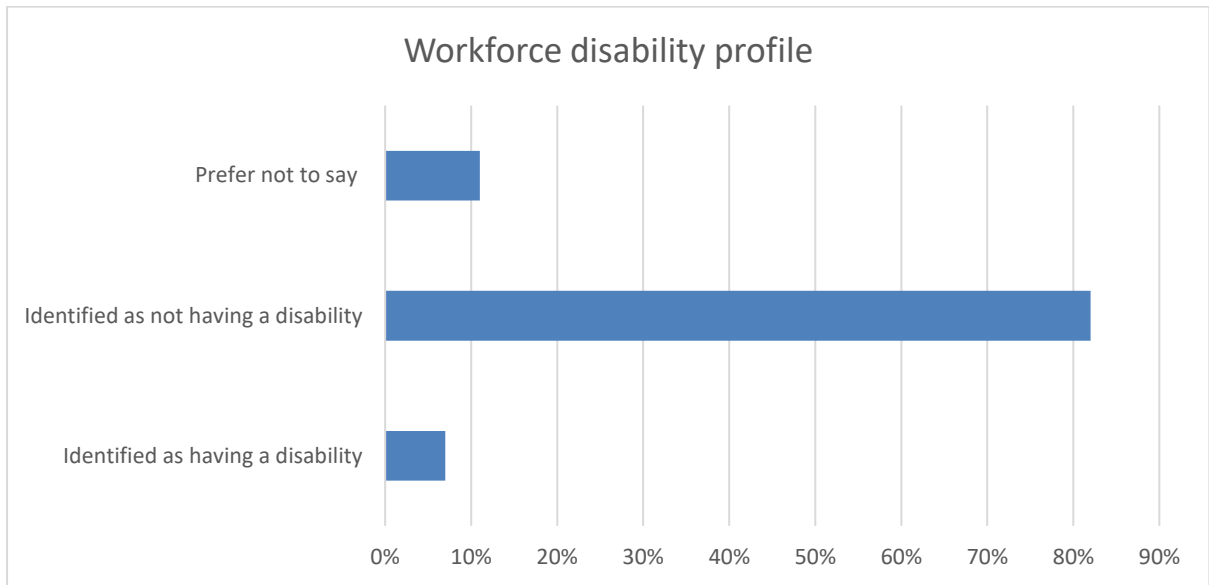
Workforce age profile

| Age Range | Employees |
|-------------------|-----------|
| 16-17 | 0% |
| 18-21 | 2% |
| 22-30 | 18% |
| 31-40 | 16% |
| 41-50 | 12% |
| 51-60 | 33% |
| 61-65 | 12% |
| 66-70 | 2% |
| 71+ | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 5% |

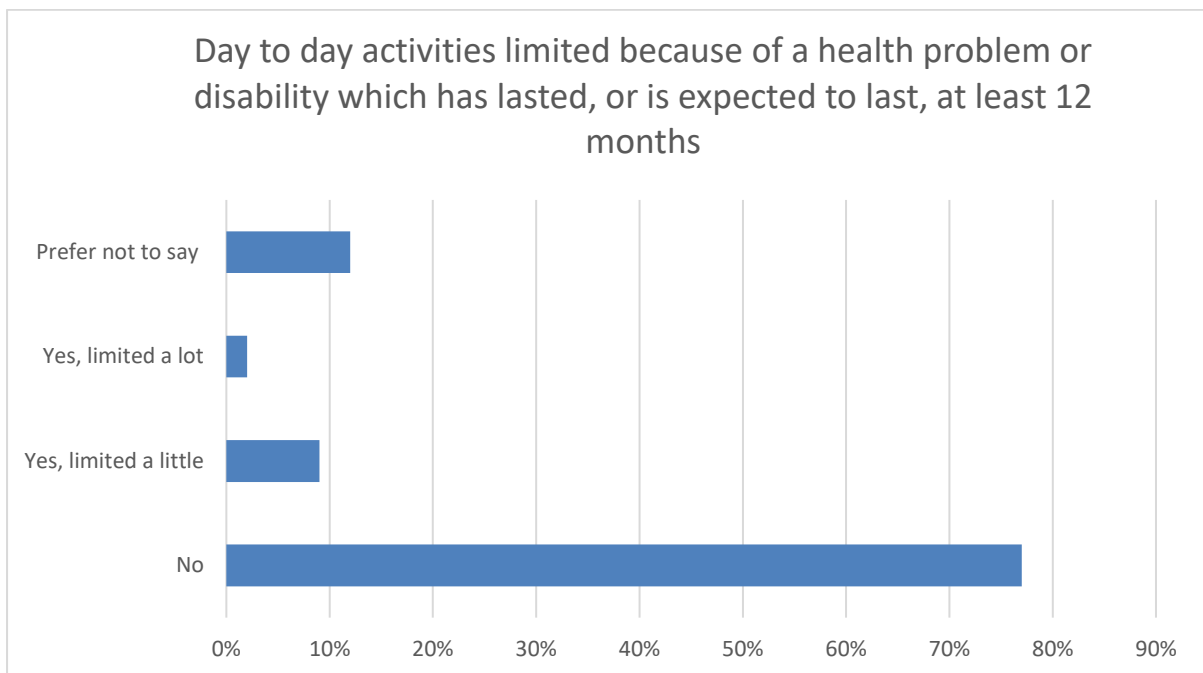


Profile of workforce with disability

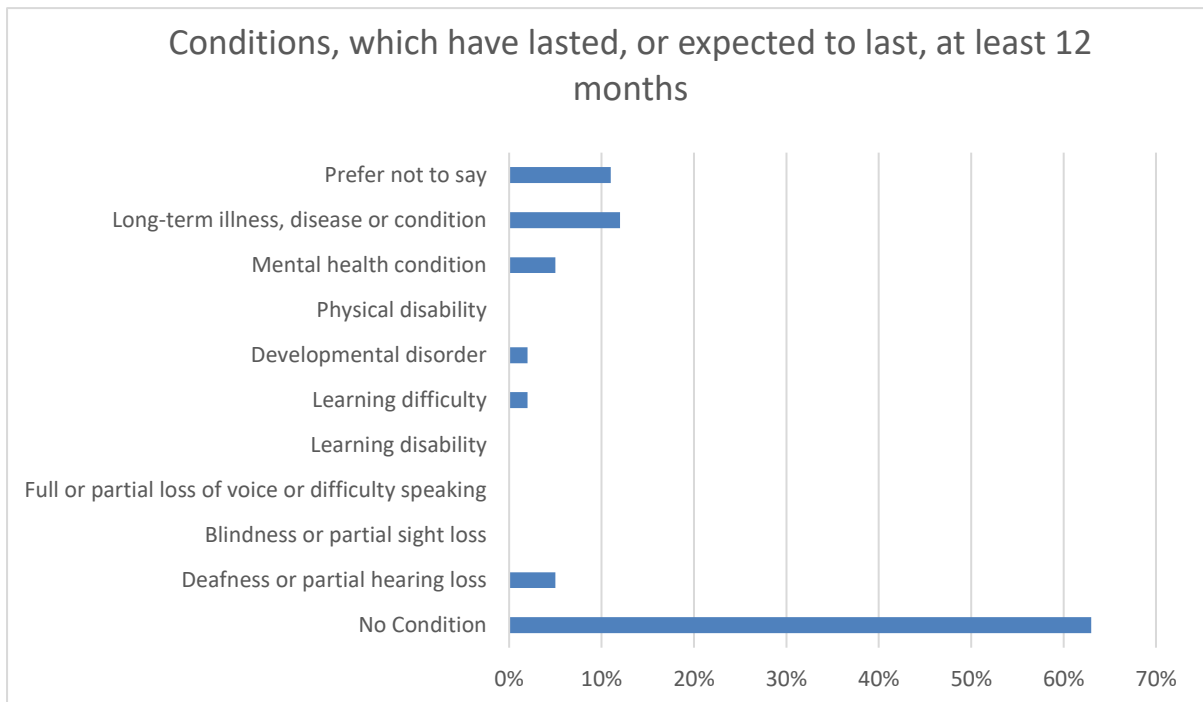
| Workforce disability profile | Employees |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|
| Identified as having a disability | 7% |
| Identified as not having a disability | 82% |
| Prefer not to say | 11% |



| Workforce disability profile - Are day to day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months | Employees |
|--|------------------|
| No | 77% |
| Yes, limited a little | 9% |
| Yes, limited a lot | 2% |
| Prefer not to say | 12% |

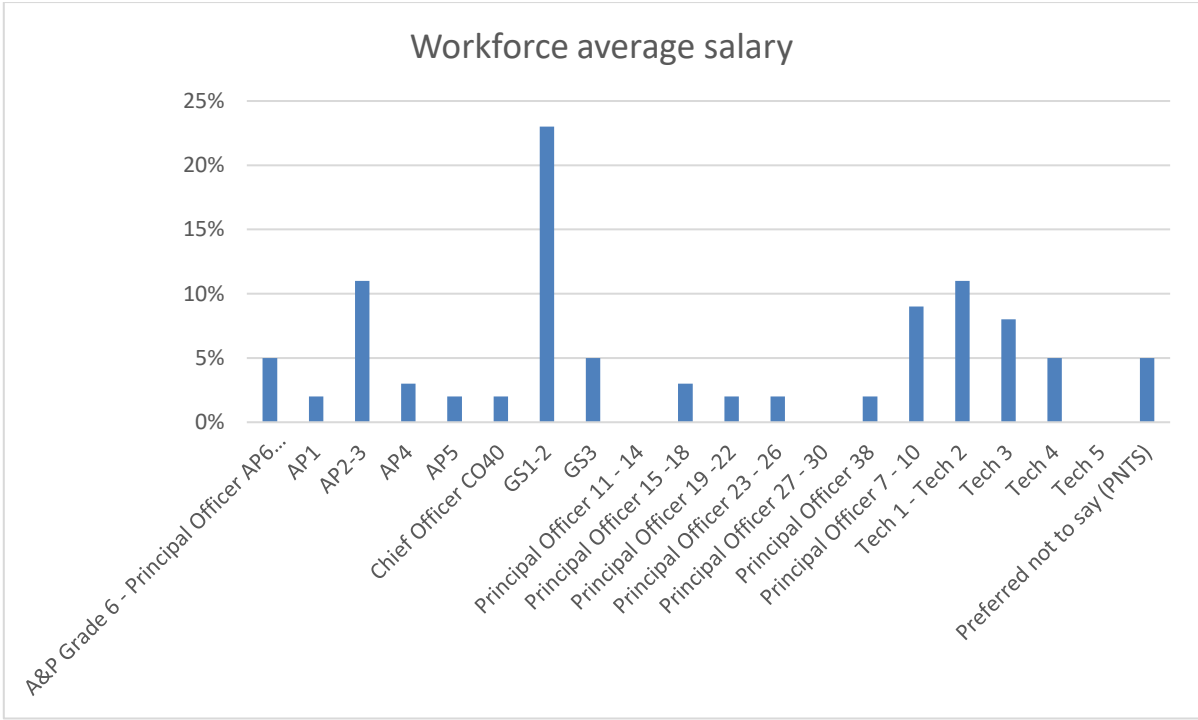


| Workforce disability profile - Do you have any of the following conditions, which have lasted, or expected to last, at least 12 months. | Employees |
|--|------------------|
| No Condition | 63% |
| Deafness or partial hearing loss | 5% |
| Blindness or partial sight loss | 0% |
| Full or partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking | 0% |
| Learning disability | 0% |
| Learning difficulty | 2% |
| Developmental disorder | 2% |
| Physical disability | 0% |
| Mental health condition | 5% |
| Long-term illness, disease or condition | 12% |
| Prefer not to say | 11% |



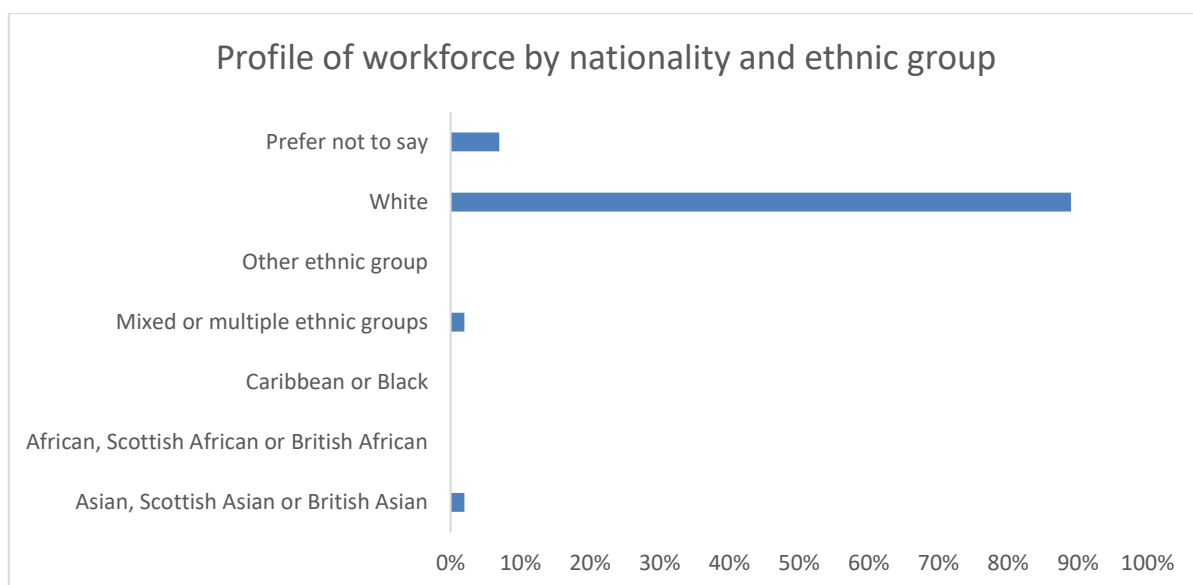
Workforce average salary

| Salary Grade | Employees |
|-----------------------------|-----------|
| GS1-2 | 23% |
| GS3 | 5% |
| AP1 | 2% |
| AP2 – AP3 | 11% |
| AP4 | 3% |
| AP5 | 2% |
| Tech 1 – Tech 2 | 11% |
| Tech 3 | 8% |
| Tech 4 | 5% |
| Tech 5 | 0% |
| PO AP6 P06-6 | 5% |
| PO 7-10 | 9% |
| PO 11-14 | 0% |
| PO 15-18 | 3% |
| PO 19-22 | 2% |
| PO 23-26 | 2% |
| PO 27-30 | 0% |
| PO 38 | 2% |
| CO40 | 2% |
| Preferred not to say (PNTS) | 5% |



Profile of workforce by nationality and ethnic group

| Ethnic Group | | Employees |
|--|--|------------------|
| Asian, Scottish Asian or British Asian | Pakistani, Scottish Pakistani, British Pakistani, Indian, Scottish Indian, British Indian, Bangladeshi, Scottish Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi, Chinese, Scottish Chinese, British Chinese or any other | 2% |
| African, Scottish African or British African | African, Scottish African or British African | 0% |
| Caribbean or Black | Caribbean or Black | 0% |
| Other ethnic group | Arab, Scottish Arab, British Arab or any other | 0% |
| Mixed or multiple ethnic groups | Mixed or multiple ethnic | 2% |
| White | Scottish, Other British, Irish, Polish, Gypsy/Traveller, Showman/Show woman, Roma, any other white ethnic group | 89% |
| Prefer not to say | | 7% |

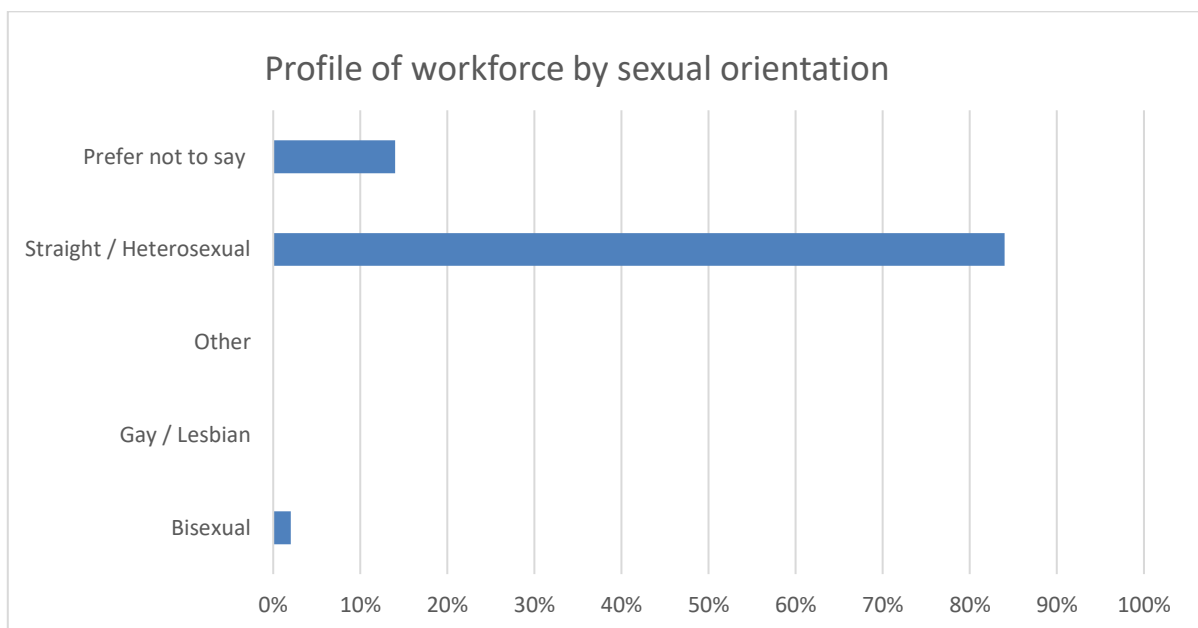


Profile of workforce by pregnancy and maternity

There were no members of staff on maternity leave as at 1 April 2025.

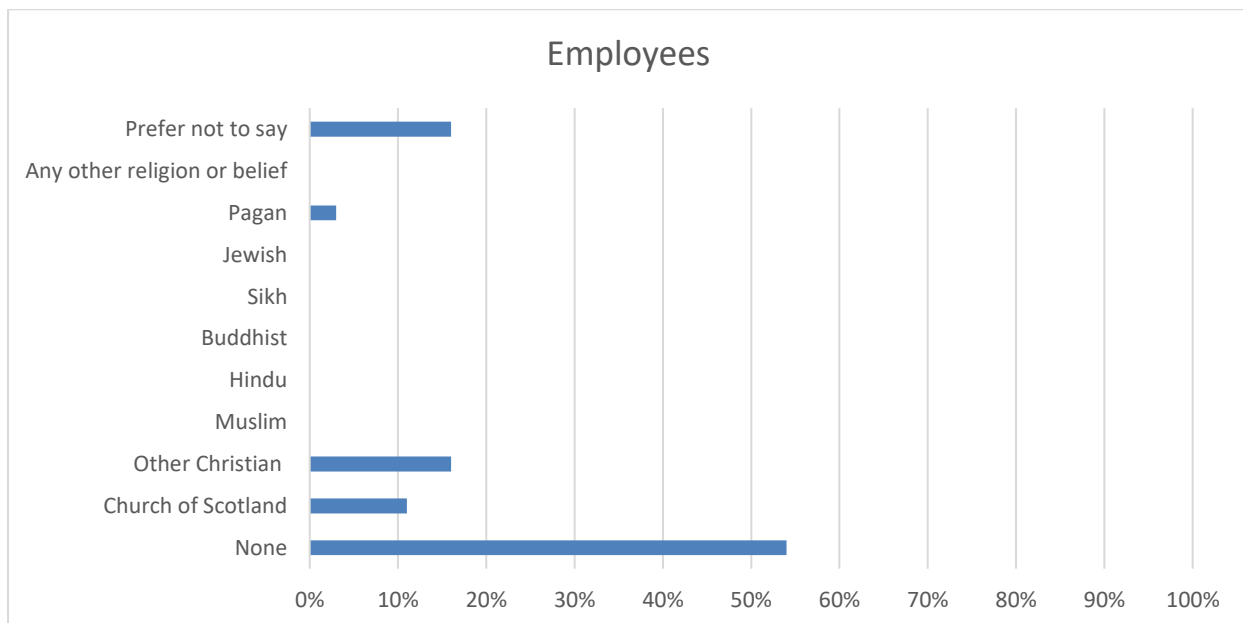
Profile of workforce by sexual orientation

| Sexual orientation | Employees |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Bisexual | 2% |
| Gay / Lesbian | 0% |
| Straight / heterosexual | 84% |
| Other | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 14% |



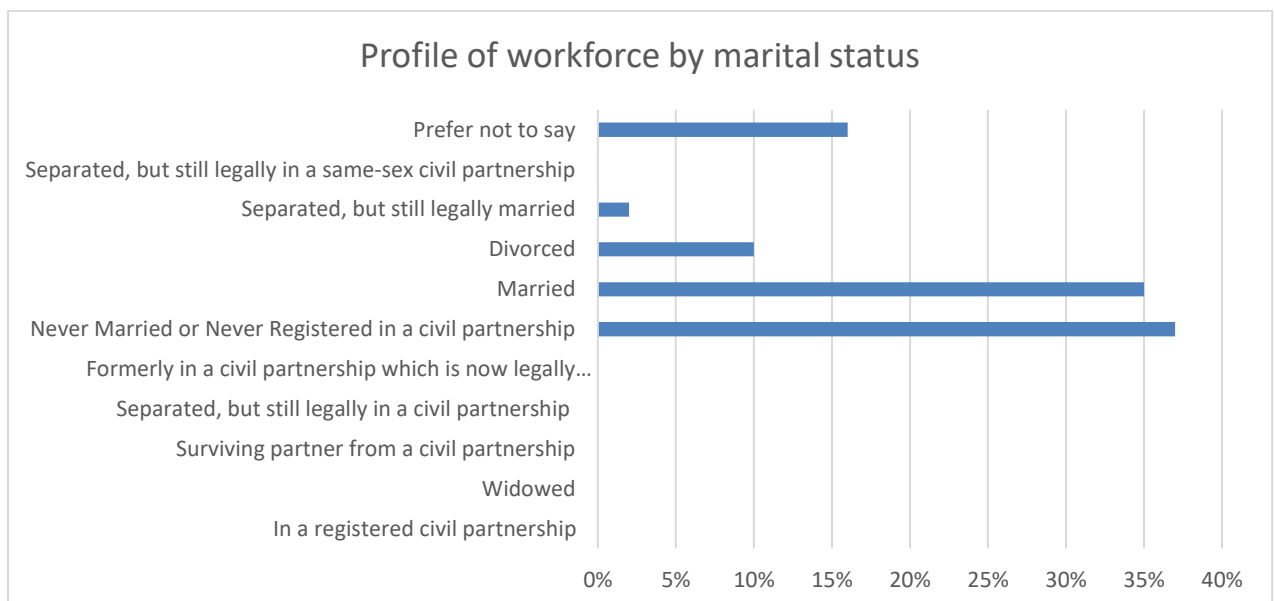
Profile of workforce by religion or belief

| Religion or belief | Employees |
|------------------------------|-----------|
| None | 54% |
| Church of Scotland | 11% |
| Other Christian | 16% |
| Muslim | 0% |
| Hindu | 0% |
| Buddhist | 0% |
| Sikh | 0% |
| Jewish | 0% |
| Pagan | 3% |
| Any other religion or belief | 0% |
| Prefer not to say | 16% |



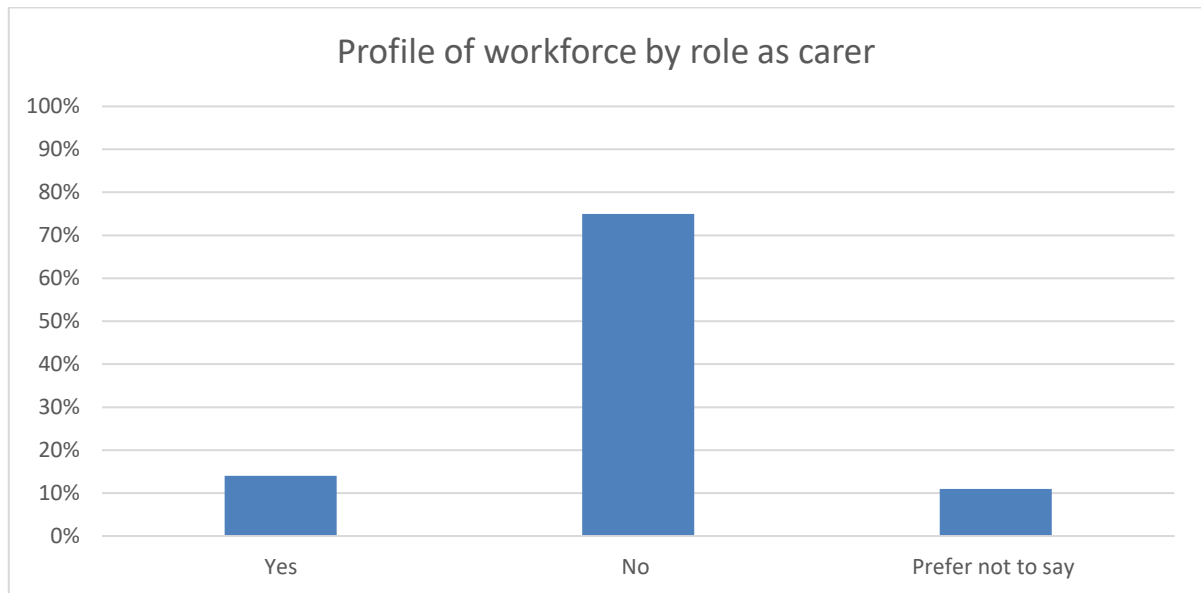
Profile of workforce by marital status

| Marital status | Employees |
|--|------------------|
| In a registered civil partnership | 0% |
| Widowed | 0% |
| Surviving partner from a civil partnership | 0% |
| Separated, but still legally in a civil partnership | 0% |
| Separated, but still legally married | 2% |
| Prefer not to say | 16% |
| Formerly in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved | 0% |
| Never married and never registered in a civil partnership | 37% |
| Married | 35% |
| Divorced | 10% |
| Separated, but still legally in a same sex civil partnership | 0% |



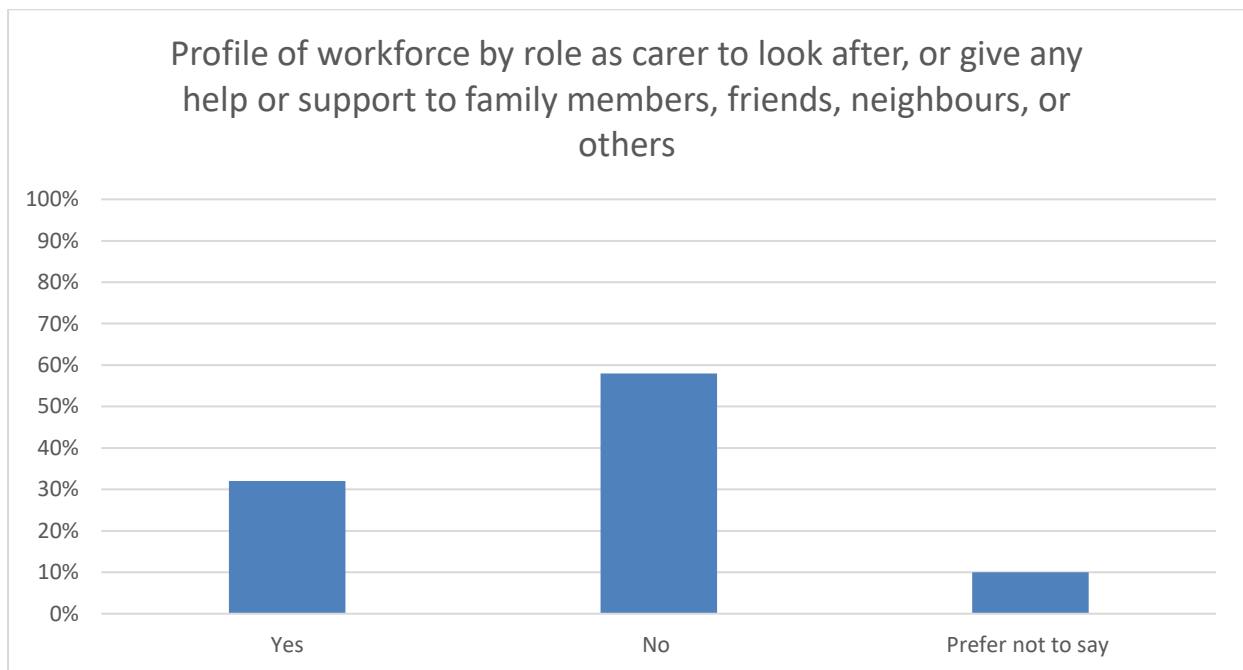
Profile of workforce by role as carer

| Role as carer | Employees |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| Yes | 14% |
| No | 75% |
| Prefer not to say | 11% |



Profile of workforce by role as carer to look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours, or others

| Role as carer | Employees |
|-------------------|-----------|
| Yes | 32% |
| No | 58% |
| Prefer not to say | 10% |



THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD

GENDER PAY GAP DATA AS AT 1 APRIL 2025

Combined Gap

| Male | Female |
|--|--|
| £1,115,346.11 – combined salary for all 27 male employees with hourly rate total of £628.51 Average hourly rate = £23.28 per hour | £800,904.52 – combined salary for all 27 female employees with hourly rate total of £464.45 Average hourly rate = £17.20 per hour |

Gender pay gap – difference between the average male and female pay rates. It is calculated by dividing the average female hourly pay rate by the average male hourly pay rate.

$$£17.20 / £23.28 \text{ per hour} \times 100/1 - 100 = -26\%$$

Full Time Gap

| Male | Female |
|--|---|
| £1,080,471.27 – combined salary for all 25 full time male employees with hourly rate total of £593.67 Average hourly rate = £23.75 per hour | £732,113.20 – combined salary for all 23 full time female employees with hourly rate total of £402.26 Average hourly rate = £17.49 |

Full time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly rate of female employees who work full time and male employees who work full time.

$$£17.49 / £23.75 \text{ per hour} \times 100/1 - 100 = -26\%$$

Part Time Gap

| Male | Female |
|---|--|
| £34,874.84 – combined salary for 2 part time male employees with hourly rate total of £34.84 Average hourly rate = £17.42 per hour | £68,791.32 – combined salary for all 4 part time female employees with hourly rate total of £62.19 Average hourly rate = £15.55 |

Part time gender pay gap is the gap between the average hourly pay rate of female employees who work part time and male employees who work part time.

$$£15.55 / £17.42 \text{ per hour} \times 100/1 - 100 = -11\%$$

| | Combined Gap | Full Time Gap | Part Time Gap |
|---------------|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| All employees | - 26% | -26% | -11% |

Positive figures indicate a pay gap to the detriment of male employees while negative figures indicate a pay gap to the detriment of female employees.

THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD
APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE
BY ETHNIC ORIGIN – 2023

| Division | No of Application Forms rec'd | No of Equal Opportunity Forms rec'd | APPLICANTS | | | | | | | SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | * Ethnic Origin | | | | | | | * Ethnic Origin | | | | | | |
| | | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Post Title | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Field Officer/Senior Technical Assistant (2 Posts) | 7 | 7 | 7 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Electoral & IT Support Officer | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Depute ERO/Business Manager | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Divisional Valuer | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Assistant Assessor | 3 | 3 | 3 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Depute Assessor & ERO | 3 | 3 | 3 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Temporary Administrative Assistant | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Clerical Assistant (3 posts) 1 offer was withdrawn | 18 | 18 | 17 | | 1 | | | | | 3 | | | | | | |

*** Ethnic Origin**

- A White
- B Mixed of Multiple Ethnic Group
- C Asian (including Scottish/British)
- D African
- E Caribbean or Black
- F Arab
- G Prefer not to answer

THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD
APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE
BY ETHNIC ORIGIN – 2024

| Division | No of Application Forms rec'd | No of Equal Opportunity Forms rec'd | APPLICANTS | | | | | | | SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--|-----------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | * Ethnic Origin | | | | | | | * Ethnic Origin | | | | | | |
| | | | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | A | B | C | D | E | F | G |
| Post Title | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Valuer – 1 applicant applied in 2022 - holding letter issued then no further action | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Field Officer / Senior Technical Assistant | 2 | 2 | 1 | | | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Graduate Trainee Valuer | 9 | 9 | 5 | | 3 | 1 | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Senior Clerical Assistant (3 Posts) | 15 | 15 | 14 | | 1 | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Administrative Assistant/Secretary | 15 | 15 | 15 | | | | | | | 1 | | | | | | |
| Administrative Assistant (3 Posts) 1 * Ethnic origin – Prefer not to say 1 * Ethnic origin – not completed | 32 | 30 | 24 | 1 | 3 | | | | | 3 | | | | | | |
| Clerical Assistant (3 Posts) 1 * Ethnic origin – Prefer not to say 1 successful candidate did not complete form | 22 | 21 | 18 | | 2 | | | | | 2 | | | | | | |

*** Ethnic Origin**

- A White
- B Mixed of Multiple Ethnic Group
- C Asian (including Scottish/British)
- D African
- E Caribbean or Black
- F Arab
- G Prefer not to answer

THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD
APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE
BY GENDER AND DISABILITY – 2023

| Division | No of Application Forms rec'd | No of Equal Opportunity Forms rec'd | APPLICANTS | | | SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE | | |
|--|--|--|------------|--------|------------|----------------------|--------|------------|
| | | | Male | Female | Disability | Male | Female | Disability |
| Post Title | | | | | | | | |
| Field Officer/Senior Technical Assistant (2 Posts advertised 1 post filled) | 7 | 7 | 4 | 3 | 1 * | 1 | | |
| Electoral & IT Support Officer | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | |
| Depute ERO/Business Manager | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | | 1 | |
| Divisional Valuer | 1 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | | |
| Assistant Assessor | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Depute Assessor & ERO | 3 | 3 | 2 | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Temporary Administrative Assistant | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | | 1 | |
| Clerical Assistant (3 posts) 1 * prefer not to answer gender question 1 * Disability question not answered | 18 | 18 | 8 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 2 | |
| * One response "Prefer not to answer" | | | | | | | | |

THE HIGHLAND & WESTERN ISLES VALUATION JOINT BOARD
APPLICATIONS RECEIVED AND SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE BY
GENDER AND DISABILITY - 2024

| Division | No of Applicati on Forms rec'd | No of Equal Opportunity Forms rec'd | APPLICANTS | | | SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE | | |
|--|--|--|------------|--------|------------|----------------------|--------|------------|
| | | | Male | Female | Disability | Male | Female | Disability |
| Post Title | | | | | | | | |
| Valuer – 1 applicant applied in 2022- holding letter issued then no further action | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Field Officer / Senior Technical Assistant | 2 | 2 | 2 | | | 1 | | |
| Graduate Trainee Valuer | 9 | 9 | 8 | 1 | | 1 | | |
| Senior Clerical Assistant (3 Posts) | 15 | 15 | 5 | 10 | 5 * | | 3 | 1* |
| Administrative Assistant/Secretary (1* prefer not to answer gender question) | 15 | 15 | | 14 | | | 1 | |
| Administrative Assistant (3 Posts) 1 * prefer not to answer gender question 1 * not answered gender question 4 * Disability – Prefer not to answer 2 * Disability – Not answered (1 of which was successful candidate) | 32 | 30 | 11 | 17 | 3 | | 3 | |
| Clerical Assistant (3 Posts) 1 * gender question – prefer not to say 2 * Disability question – Not answered 1 * Disability question – Prefer not to say. Successful candidate did not complete form. | 22 | 21 | 4 | 16 | 1 | 1 | 1 | |
| * One response “Prefer not to answer” | | | | | | | | |