
REPORT

Equality, diversity and inclusion at sportscotland

Equality Outcomes 2025-29 -

Consultation findings report

April 2025

Welcome to **sportscotland's Equality Outcomes Consultation Findings Report 2025**.

Our Equality Outcomes in 2021-25 were person-centred and focused on people that:

- Live in poverty and low income
- Experience mental health problems
- Are over 50 years old
- Are part of our diverse ethnic communities

We intend to retain these outcomes and these focus groups as our 2025-29 equality outcomes, building on the learning from our 2021-25 outcomes.

In February 2025, **sportscotland** invited people from inside and outside of sport to take part in a public consultation to understand if these focus groups are still relevant for 2025-29.

The consultation was conducted through an online survey and three separate online semi-structured focus groups. The findings from this consultation are available in this report.

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Executive summary

Equality Outcomes 2025-29

We wish to retain our previously set 2021-25 equality outcomes for 2025-29. In February 2025, **sportscotland** invited people from inside and outside of sport to take part in a public consultation to understand if these focus groups are still relevant for 2025-29.

sportscotland's Equality Outcomes 2025-29:

We will help people who:	
	Experience mental health problems
Are over 50 years old	Are part of our diverse ethnic communities
To experience these outcomes	
I see and hear people like me taking part.	
I have a voice in the decisions that affect me.	
I feel like taking part is for me	
I can find opportunities that meet my needs	

Consultation Findings

Involvement

A wide range of individuals and organisations helped to shape our new outcomes. There were 238 responses from the **online survey** and 33 people took part in the **online group discussions**.

Diversity and intersectionality

Many different factors or characteristics shape people lives – it is rarely a single protected characteristic. Respondents were able to bring to life the complexity of people's identities and the factors which impact on their participation in sport.

Many people emphasised the need to recognise the diversity of each of the focus groups. It is these diverse needs we now need to understand and respond to as we design new activities or services for these groups.

Key Findings

After analysis of the online survey and semi-structured focus groups, there were six major findings from this consultation:

- 1. The proposed 2025-29 focus groups are valued and relevant** - most respondents said they felt our focus was “highly relevant” for each group. The group with the most relevance was poverty and low income, followed by mental health problems, diverse ethnic communities and over 50s.
- 2. The poverty and low-income group were considered most valued out of the four focus groups** – respondents consistently highlighted poverty and low income as intersecting with all other groups.
- 3. Disability, women & girls, LGBTQI+ and care experienced people were most consistently highlighted as groups requiring additional focus** - these groups were also highlighted in our previous report, but this year, disability superseded women & girls.
- 4. Intersectionality must be considered within the focus groups and beyond** - respondents consistently highlighted that solving one barrier to participation often isn't enough; multiple barriers need to be addressed simultaneously to create meaningful change. This comprehensive approach ensures that all aspects of a person's identity are considered, leading to more effective and inclusive solutions.
- 5. Sub-groups present within the focus groups and beyond must be considered** – respondents emphasised examining sub-sets within each focus group as each have unique barriers and facilitators to sport and physical activity. For our focus groups this was particularly relevant for diverse ethnic communities.
- 6. Necessity for a central repository to understand and track initiatives and programs targeting each equality focus group** - such a hub would facilitate the sharing of learnings, best practices, and resources among organisations, fostering collaboration to achieve outcomes. This collective approach is crucial for generating significant and lasting impact on the under-represented groups in sports.

“Overall, I think these are important outcomes but no more important than all the other protected characteristic groups. I think focusing on outcomes that transcend across different groups should be paramount (e.g., poverty and mental health). If we start looking at things like ethnicity, we will need to go further into what is required to make real impact to the sub-groups that are least represented.”

Next steps

Co-producing our action plans: We are committed to putting people at the heart of the decision-making process as we design and deliver new ideas to achieve the 2025-29 outcomes. We have successfully delivered a co-designed Amina Active sport and physical activity project for Muslim women. We are taking our learnings from this and applying them

to our other new idea projects (i.e. working with Clackmannanshire Council to target people over 50 in poverty and low-income areas).

Delivering: We will continue to work with partners and stakeholders to deliver our action plans and test out new ideas.

Learning: We will continue to monitor, evaluate and adapt. This might mean changing actions, updating our equality outcomes or bringing the learning into our mainstream activities. We will be prepared to fail and learn.

Introduction

Report purpose

This reports primary aim is to share the findings from **sportscotland's** Equality Outcomes Consultation for 2025. This was conducted to ascertain if the previously set outcomes for 2021-25 are still relevant for 2025-29.

Background

sportscotland is the national agency for sport. Our vision is an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport. To achieve this, equality must be central to what we do.

What is an equality outcome?

Equality outcomes are specific priority areas of work where we aim to deliver targeted improvements for specific populations who have the most pressing inequalities. *Equality outcomes are only one, specific part of the equality work we do.* Through our processes for mainstreaming equality, such as equality impact assessments, and our policies and working practices, we strive to make our work inclusive.

In Scotland, all public bodies must set equality outcomes at least every four years. This is part of the Scottish Public Sector Equality Duties. Achieving our Equality Outcomes should accelerate progress on some of the most pressing inequalities in our sector. **Sportscotland's** approach is to deliver Equality Outcomes through the New Ideas strand of our approach:



More information about this overall approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the delivery of the Outcomes is available on the **sportscotland** website¹. A summary is included in Appendix 1.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

¹ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

We are a public body funded by Scottish Government and the National Lottery. As a public body, we must meet specific Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) designed to help us meet the general duties set out in the Equality Act 2010.

In Scotland, the purpose of the PSED is to ensure that public authorities consider how they can positively contribute to a more equal society through advancing equality in their day-to-day business and:

- take effective action on equality
- make the right decisions, first time around
- develop better policies and practices, based on evidence
- be more transparent, accessible and accountable
- deliver improved outcomes for all.

The PSED require public authorities like **sportscotland** to publish and report our progress towards achieving a set of equality outcomes, at least every four years.

Equality outcomes 2025-29

Our equality outcome for 2021-25 were developed with the involvement of people who share protected characteristics as well as representative organisations. They are person-centred statements which describe changes four focus groups will experience because of our actions. We want to retain these equality outcome statements for 2025-29.

Our previous outcomes (2017-21) focused on the needs of young people from our most deprived areas, girls and young women and disabled young people. We have grown new collaborations and activities responding to the needs of these groups. We are committed to continuing that work because more can be achieved. Our retained equality outcomes for 2025-29 are below:

We will help people who:	
	Experience mental health problems
Are over 50 years old	Are part of our diverse ethnic communities
To experience these outcomes	
I see and hear people like me taking part.	
I have a voice in the decisions that affect me.	
I feel like taking part is for me	
I can find opportunities that meet my needs	

Consultation approach

In this section we summarise the consultation approach.

Purpose and methods

The consultation started on 20th January 2025 and ran until 13th of March 2025. The aim of the consultation was to understand if these focus groups are still relevant for 2025-29.

People who live in poverty and low income

People who experience mental health problems

People who are over 50 years old

People who are part of our diverse ethnic communities

To complete this consultation, we conducted:

1. An **online questionnaire** which was distributed through our social channels, to our stakeholders and their networks.
2. **Three semi-structured online focus groups.**

Through these methods we asked key questions, namely:

1. How **relevant** do you believe each focus group is for 2025-29?
2. Are there other groups you feel we have **overlooked**?
3. Are you aware of any **programs or initiatives** within your area that focuses on these groups already?

Evidence based

A wide range of evidence informed our decision to retain the previously set 2021-25 outcomes for the next 4-year cycle (2025-29). This evidence was from the Scottish Census data, which provides overarching data on the current demography, health and inequalities data across Scotland as a whole. Additionally, we utilised our recent [Equality and Sport Research 2024](#) findings to further support our rationale. Key statistics for each group are below:

People who live in poverty and low income

Poverty and low income emerged consistently as a key barrier through our primary research, particularly within the context of the rising cost of living. Many of those we engaged with were keen to emphasise that poverty and low income is a factor which is relevant across all equalities characteristics and is seen as playing a key role in reinforcing disparities in participation across the population as a whole.

People who experience mental health problems

The 2022 Scottish Census data highlighted that 617,100 people (11.3%) of the Scottish population reported they had a mental health condition. This is a growing issue in society (4.4% in 2011 to 11.3% in 2022) and is largely driven by young people reporting a mental health condition.

People who are over 50 years old

National data tells us that participation in Scotland declines significantly with age. Participation is lowest amongst adults aged 65+ living in the most deprived SIMD areas, while the prevalence of loneliness is highest amongst those who rarely or never participate in sport. This is identified as a key public policy challenge within the context of Scotland's ageing population. Results from the 2022 census show that 20% of the population are now 65 and over, an increase of 22.5% since 2011.

People who are part of our diverse ethnic communities

Race and ethnicity have been the most prominent equality theme in published research since 2020. This research has covered issues including racism at the grassroots and community sport levels, the under-representation of coaches from ethnically diverse backgrounds in the UK, and the impact of racism on elite athletes. Race and ethnicity (jointly with gender reassignment) still emerged in 2024 as the equalities issue which respondents were most likely to say they wished to receive support, training or guidance on in the future (71.6% of respondents).

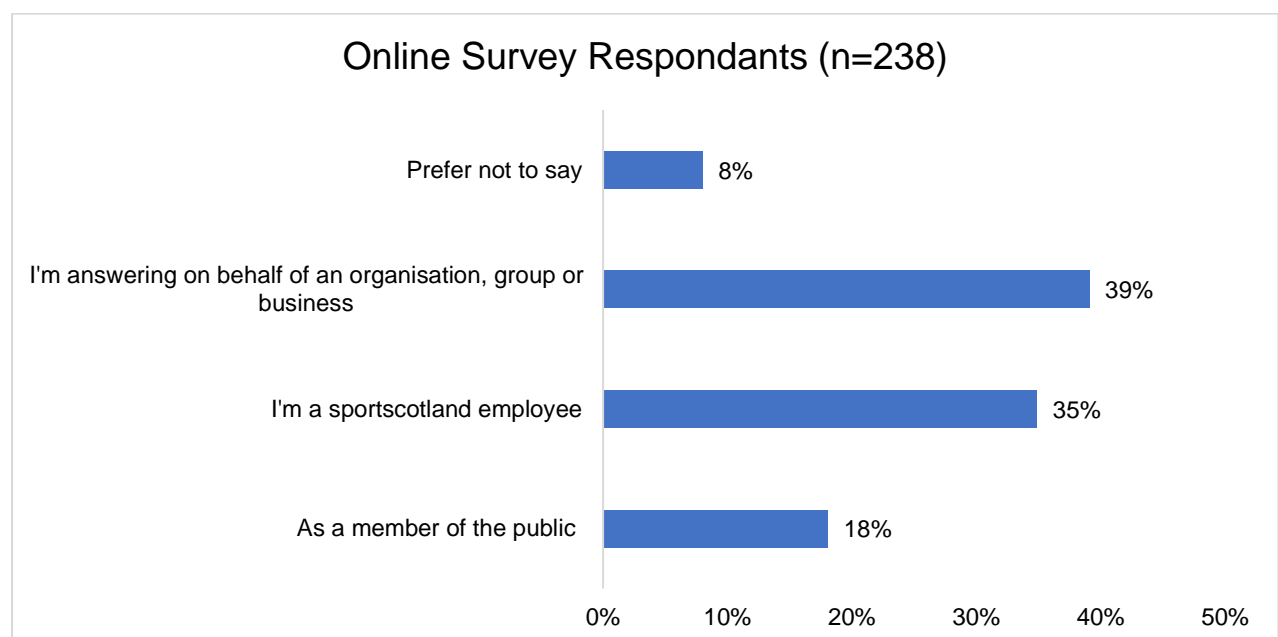
Consultation Reach

The consultation respondents included:

- People with lived experience
- National and local government
- Sport organisations
- Equality organisations

There were 238 responses from the **online survey** and 33 people took part in the **online group discussions**.

The characteristics of the online survey respondents are included in **Appendix 2**. The chart below shows the different ways people chose to respond to the online survey:



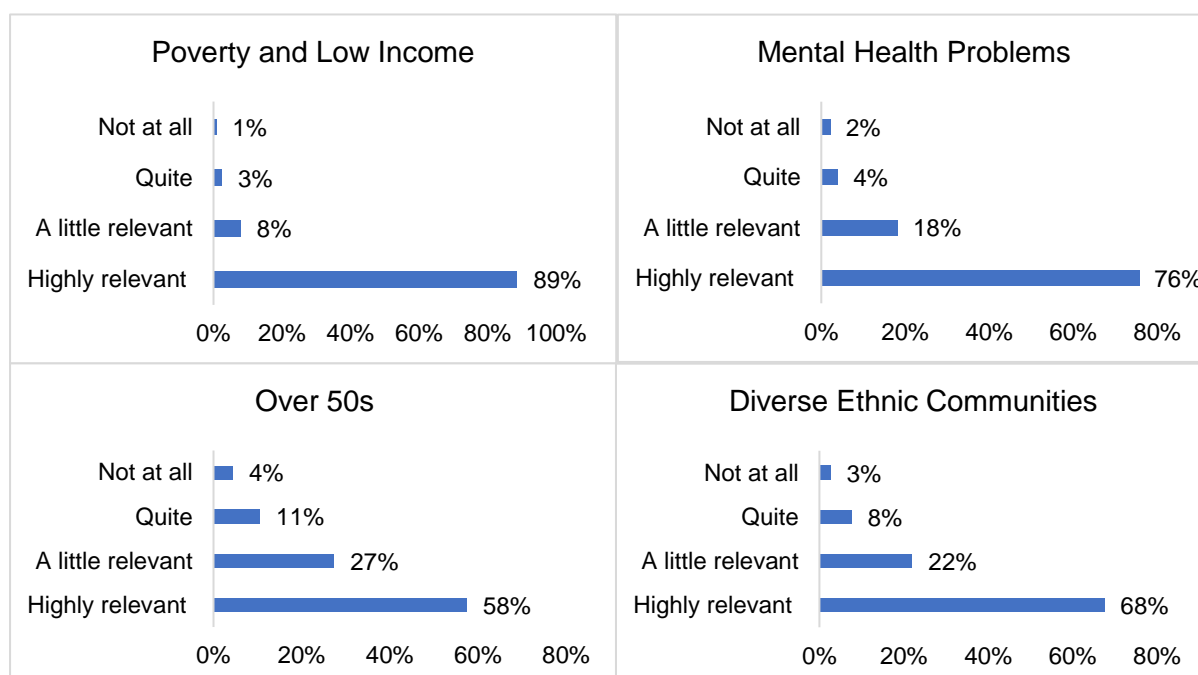
Our findings

This section summarises our consultation analysis and key findings.

Relevance

We asked respondents about the relevance of our focus groups and most respondents said they felt our focus was “highly relevant” for each group. The group with the most relevance was poverty and low income, followed by mental health problems, diverse ethnic communities and over 50s. The detailed results are listed in **Figure 1**.

Figure 1: Perceived relevance of each focus group (online survey responses).



Respondents were also asked to provide any additional comments on each of these groups. From analysing the comments, there were two overarching themes:

1. **Intersectionality Acknowledgement** – Respondents emphasized the importance of acknowledging intersectionality, noting that focus groups often overlapped with each other and other protected characteristics. Importantly, they consistently highlighted poverty and low income as intersecting with all other groups.

“I think these four areas cover a significant focus of work however, being mindful that there is often an element of intersectionality which impacts participation shouldn't be forgotten. Other protected characteristics need to be considered across the work that organisations do. Solving one barrier to participation often isn't enough we need to be solving several to make real progress.”

“I think this [Poverty and Low Income] is perhaps one of the most important outcomes. Wealth and poverty intersect into all areas of life and can drastically influence physical activity and sporting outcomes.”

2. **Training and Education** – cultural and societal barriers towards engaging these groups were frequently discussed. Most respondents highlighted the need for tailored programs and education in a bid to combat these barriers.

“There is a definite need for better training and awareness at all levels, children to club committees. We don't all understand why others may face discrimination if we aren't told, or worse, if myths around protected characteristic groups in sport are not dispelled.”

3. **Sub-sets of each focus group** – many respondents emphasized examining sub-sets within each focus group, particularly diverse ethnic communities, each with unique barriers and facilitators to sport and physical activity.

“It is important to consider that people of diverse race and ethnicity are not one homogenous group. Needs and cultures differ significantly.”

“I think the main issue that lies here is use of language and stigma. From basic experience it seems more folk within this group are getting involved in sport and physical activity and more initiatives are targeting the group. However, this is a very broad group. Who is it exactly within this equality outcome we should be targeting? I think in order for this outcome to have true meaning there needs to be further research into exactly what sub-group requires the most support.”

Views on groups we have overlooked

We also asked respondents to tell us about any groups or experiences they felt we had overlooked. In total, 90 people answered this question. Most respondents stated they were satisfied with the focus groups for 2025-29. However, respondents felt **sportscotland** should focus more on disability, women and girls, the LGBTI+ community, and those with care experience. These groups were also highlighted in our previous report, but this year, disability superseded women & girls and was considered the most overlooked.

When respondents were discussing each overlooked group, intersectionality and the importance of investigating the sub-sets of protected characteristic groups were consistently discussed. Sub-groups were categorised into the relevant protected characteristic group as defined in the 2010 Equality Act (e.g. neurodiverse group categorised under disability). All groups and issues highlighted by respondents are included in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Overlooked groups highlighted in the online survey.

Group	No.
Disability	32
Women and girls	18
LGBTI+	8
Care experienced	4
Rural disadvantage	4
Males	2
Pregnancy	1
Marital Status	1

Disability

32 respondents highlighted disability as an area that is overlooked. After analysis, the major theme identified that explained why respondents felt disability is overlooked as a group was **lack of visibility and representation**. Respondents felt that when the equality outcome focus groups shifted away from disability since 2017-21 there was less visibility and representation of the group.

"Are the challenges still being faced by people with physical disabilities still being addressed or, due to the fact this is one of the more widely known and long supported groups, this is now considered as an issue that is on enough agendas now that it can be downgraded?"

Women and girls

18 respondents highlighted women & girls as an area that is overlooked. After analysis, the major theme identified was the noticeable **drop in girls participation during puberty** which subsequently affects participation later in life.

"I still see a huge drop off in female participation at an early age. I feel early intervention and continued development of activities and sport for females will keep females involved in sport and activity."

"Girls leaving sport when they hit puberty and thus missing out on a lifetime connection with a positive relationship with sport."

LGBTI+

The LGBTI+ community emerged as an overlooked group (n=8). Specifically, respondents discussed the need for resources required to support this group to participate in sport:

“There definitely needs to be more work to include people from LGBTQI+ community. Most coaches have no training or access to resources of how to support, and protect, trans athletes and gender affirming practices. Also, few coaches think sexual orientation is in any way relevant in their sessions. It shouldn't be but can make people more vulnerable to bullying or abuse either within the club or elsewhere in the community so may need more support and protections in places.”

Across the survey and focus groups, respondents noted political developments impacting this group, emphasizing the importance of dedicated support. The consensus was to prioritize inclusion efforts for this group, ensuring commitment to diversity despite external influences.

“LGBTQ+, with recent word of different countries moving backwards with this community it is key to show our younger generation that Scotland stands by them and sport can be a place where they can be themselves.”

Care Experienced

Care experienced people was another overlooked group (n=4). This group was discussed more extensively in the focus group.

“Care experienced I think has been over-looked and should be considered in the new strategy.”

Over-Arching Themes

There were three over-arching themes arising from all the data collected (i.e. online survey, semi-structured focus groups); 1) Intersectionality; 2) Sub-group acknowledgement and 3) Initiative and Program Repository. Each of these themes were discussed consistently throughout the consultation.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality was a major theme arising from all the data collected (i.e. online survey, each semi-structured focus group). Respondents highlighted that a person-centered approach considering intersectionality is crucial and should be paramount when in practice.

Respondents consistently highlighted that solving one barrier to participation often isn't enough; multiple barriers need to be addressed simultaneously to create meaningful change. For example, there is a need to better understand and describe intersectionality when considering people living with poverty, disability, and race/ethnicity. This comprehensive approach ensures that all aspects of a person's identity are considered, leading to more effective and inclusive solutions.

Sub-group Acknowledgement

The need to understand and acknowledge sub-groups was another major theme. This was particularly evident when respondents were asked about groups they felt might have been overlooked. This emphasis was particularly strong regarding protected characteristic groups such as disability and race and ethnicity.

Initiatives and Programs Repository

One key theme from the online semi-structured focus groups was the necessity for a central repository to understand and track initiatives and programs targeting each equality focus group in Scotland. Such a hub would facilitate the sharing of learnings, best practices, and resources among organizations, fostering collaboration to achieve outcomes. This collective approach is crucial for generating significant and lasting impact on the under-represented groups in sports.

Conclusion

Respondents in this consultation understood the need to retain our focus groups for 2025-29. They understood their value, particularly the poverty and low income focus group which they believed most strongly intersected with the other three focus groups. However, they also believed that intersectionality needs to be in the forefront of our minds and that while we might target specific groups, it is highly likely other characteristics will be present. Finally, respondents highlighted the need for **sportscotland** to highlight and recognise the sub-groups present for each focus group, particularly those from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

While respondents were satisfied with our focus groups for 2025-29, they also highlighted other groups they felt were overlooked (disability, women & girls, LGBTI+ community and care experienced people). These were the same groups respondents felt were overlooked in our previous report. Importantly, when respondents were discussing these overlooked groups, they mentioned again intersectionality, the importance of sub-group acknowledgement and the need for a program and initiative repository which would signpost those working with specific groups to best practice and create networking opportunities.

Delivering the outcomes

The 2025-29 outcomes will continue to be delivered through the New Ideas strand of our work. To meet the needs of under-represented groups in sport we believe they must be recognised as key stakeholders and be at the heart of decision making. We want our decision-making to be more:

- **Open** - so that people can understand, influence and hold decision-makers to account for their actions and inactions.
- **Participatory** - so that people have the freedom, support and opportunity to shape their opportunities to take part and influence the decisions that affect their lives; and,
- **Deliberative** - so that people can exchange and acknowledge different perspectives, understand conflict and find common ground, and build a shared vision.

We are committed to working alongside all key stakeholders to agree the best way to work together and ensure people are at the heart of decision making. Thus far, **sportscotland** has worked in partnership with Amina, The Muslim Women's Resource Centre, to develop a physical activity and sport project for Muslim women. This project was co-designed and put the people it aimed to target at the forefront of decision making. This project aimed to target the people from diverse ethnic backgrounds and facilitated the delivery of our 2025-29 outcomes. The project was a success but importantly, there were key learnings that we took away from the project. Please see the Amina Active: New Ideas Infographic in **Appendix 3** for a more detailed account of our findings from the project.

These learnings will be considered as we move forward with our New Ideas work. Currently, they are being utilised to facilitate a co-design project for the poverty and low income and over 50s focus groups in Clackmannanshire.

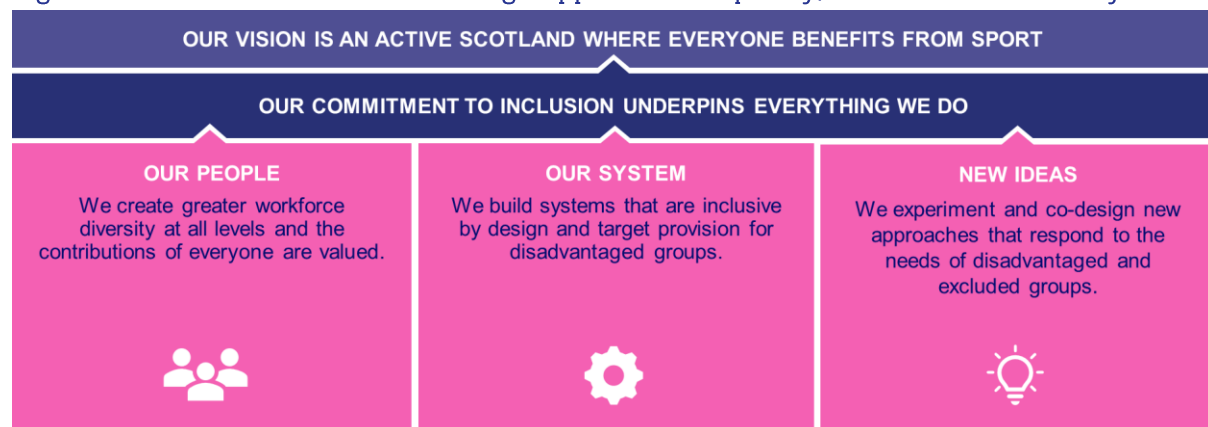
Appendix 1: Equality, diversity and inclusion at sportscotland

Strategic context

In May 2019, we launched our new corporate strategy: [Sport for Life](#). The strategy outlines our vision of an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport. It sets out our commitment to inclusion underpinning everything we do.

In 2021 we broadened Sport For Life to include three new strands (see Figure 1) aligned to the Public Sector Equality Duty. These strands form the strategic framework for all our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion work. Delivering activity through these strands will help us build a system that is inclusive by design.

Figure 1. Three strands form our strategic approach for Equality, Inclusion and Diversity.



The three strands are:

Our people – We will champion inclusion and lead by example. We create an environment for change by embedding inclusion in the support and development of “our people”.

Our system – We will debias mainstream systems and processes. Our system will be inclusive by design. We will give focus to specific disadvantaged or under-represented groups to help decision making and ensure additional, targeted support helps reduce inequalities.

New ideas – Going forward, we will deliver our “**Equality Outcomes**” through the New Ideas strand of our strategy. This means we test new ways to tackle some of the most pressing inequalities and improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups. We take time to understand the needs of these groups. We will be prepared to fail and learn.

Appendix 2: Characteristics of survey respondents

How old are you?

What is your sex?

SIMD/Poverty (Determined through postcode):

Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?

Trans Status	Percentage	Number
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Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?

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Do you have any of the following, which have lasted, or are expected to last, at least 12 months? Tick all that apply.

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What is your ethnic group?

Ethnic Group	Percentage	Number
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White Scottish	76.1%	156
White other British	11.2%	23
White other	3.9%	8
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	3.4%	7
African, Scottish African or British African	1.0%	2
Caribbean or Black	0.0%	0
Mixed or multiple ethnic origin	1.5%	3
Other ethnic origin	0.5%	1
Prefer not to say	2.4%	5
Total	100.0%	205

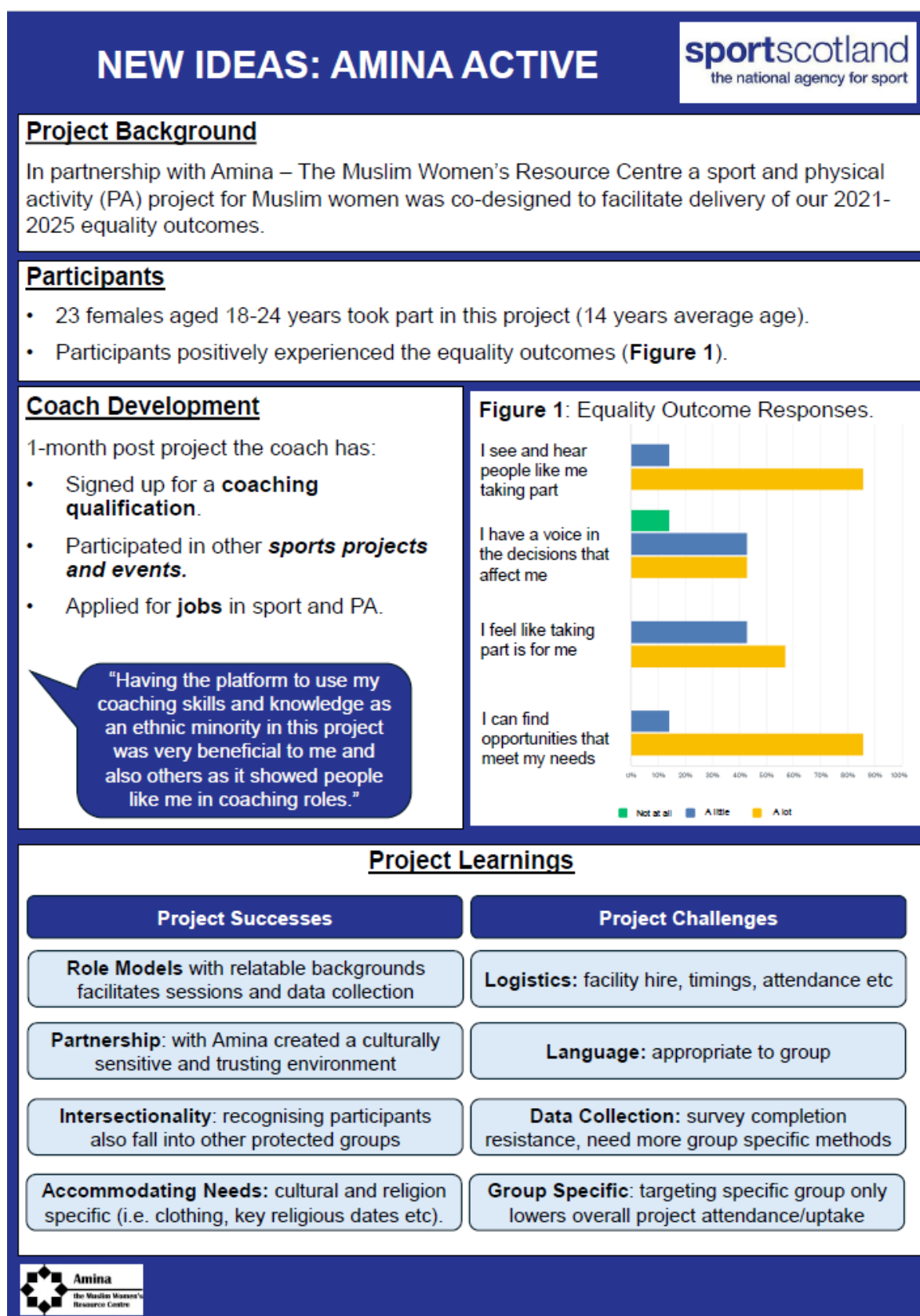
How would you describe your sexual orientation?

Sexual Orientation	Percentage	Number
Straight/Heterosexual	85.1%	172
Gay or Lesbian	6.9%	14
Bisexual	1.5%	3
Prefer not to say	6.4%	13
Total	100.0%	202

What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

Religious Status	Percentage	Number
None	61.4%	124
Church of Scotland	14.9%	30
Roman Catholic	14.9%	30
Other Christian	3.0%	6
Buddist	0.0%	0
Hindu	0.0%	0
Jewish	0.0%	0
Muslim	3.0%	6
Sikh	0.5%	1
Pagan	0.5%	1
Prefer not to say	2.0%	4
Total	100.0%	202

Appendix 3: Amina Active, New Ideas Infographic



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