



Estyn Annual Equality Report 2026

This report is also available in Welsh

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Foreword

We are here for learners, all learners. Our Strategic Equality Plan for 2024–2028 set out ambitious equality objectives to support our mission of helping education and training providers develop a self-improving and learning culture through our advice, inspection and capacity-building work. Our equality objectives cover how we consider equality, diversity and inclusion through inspection, as well as how we ensure that our staff and those we work with have equality of opportunity and are treated fairly and with respect.

Now at the midpoint of our Strategic Equality Plan, we continue to make positive progress towards achieving these ambitions. During the past year, we delivered the third cohort of our Ethnic Minority Leaders Programme, which continues to grow in scale, reputation and impact. We strengthened our engagement with a wide range of partners and communities across Wales to ensure that diverse voices help shape and challenge our work. We also increased our organisational capacity to lead equality and diversity initiatives and continued to review our recruitment processes to promote greater inclusivity.

Through our inspection and thematic work, we have continued to highlight effective practice and areas for improvement. This year, our annual report explored the experiences of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners and identified the importance of inclusive cultures, strong partnerships and sustained leadership in improving outcomes. We also hosted anti-racist summits with partners across the education sector and developed our anti-poverty strategy to strengthen our contribution to ensuring that all learners have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their background or circumstances.

Within Estyn, we have continued to embed equality, diversity and inclusion in our culture and ways of working. We have revised our values and behaviours, strengthened our use of equality impact assessments, invested in professional learning on the Public Sector Equality Duty, piloted reverse mentoring arrangements and worked with staff to develop a new wellbeing strategy focused on creating a healthier, more inclusive workplace.

This report summarises our progress over the past year and identifies further areas of focus as we enter the final two years of our Strategic Equality Plan. While we are encouraged by the progress made, we recognise that there is more to do. We remain committed to working alongside learners, education professionals, partners and our staff to ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion remain at the heart of everything we do and that we continue to contribute to a fairer and more equal Wales.

Owen Evans, His Majesty's Chief Inspector

Introduction

This annual equality report reviews Estyn's progress in delivering the commitments set out in the Strategic Equality Plan 2024–2028. It summarises the work carried out during the 2025–2026 year and highlights areas where further progress is required.

What information we collect and how we use it

We recognise the vital importance of data and insight to both monitor and drive progress during the Strategic Equality Plan period.

We collect a wide range of robust data across a range of areas, including workforce (across all protected characteristics), recruitment, starters and leavers. We use this data to monitor the diversity of applications to our vacancies, and identify any barriers in our recruitment process and ensure our recruitment practices are fair and inclusive at every stage.

For existing staff, collecting and monitoring equality data helps us to understand the diversity of our workforce, identify and address any disparities in experience, development, or progression and shape policies and initiatives that support inclusion and equity across Estyn.

Demographic data for existing staff, leavers and applicants can be found in Annex A.

Progress against our equality objectives

This section summarises progress made against the equality objectives set out in the Strategic Equality Plan.

Equality objective 1: We will work to increase the diversity of our staff, our external inspectors and the partner voices that enrich our work

We said we will:

- review our staff recruitment processes after each campaign to consider what more we can do to increase the diversity of our staff, including considering how to achieve more diversity on interview panels
- continue to deliver our leadership programme to raise awareness of our work with aspiring education leaders from ethnic backgrounds that are underrepresented in our staff and external inspector workforce

- improve the data we hold about our external inspector workforce to understand any underrepresented groups better
- actively work with national partner groups to ensure diverse recruitment of lay inspectors
- review recruitment materials and processes for external inspectors to ensure they represent the full diversity of Wales
- ensure that our parent and carer forum includes parents with different protected characteristics
- continue to engage with organisations that champion protected characteristics
- ensure recruitment of non-executive directors maintains diversity on the strategy board

Progress this year:

In 2025-2026, we hosted the third cohort of our Ethnic Minority Leaders Programme. The number of applicants increased significantly, demonstrating that the programme is becoming embedded and recognised for its quality and value. Thirteen applicants were successful; however, we capped the number of participants at eight to ensure that the programme remains manageable within work programme constraints and budget. The eight successful applicants joined the Primary, Further Education and Local Government strands of the programme. Five secondary candidates have been deferred to 2026-2027. We will run a targeted campaign in a narrow set of sectors to fill the remaining three places. Small groups help delegates develop a sense of connectedness and receive the individualised support that the programme is designed to achieve. Around half of this year's cohort achieved promotion in year.

We onboarded two new HMI to help deliver the programme for the FE and LGES sectors. This aligns with the programme's vision of providing opportunities for different HMIs to engage with the programme, benefit from working with underrepresented groups, and develop deeper insight into the challenges they face.

We have surveyed our external workforce to establish how representative they are of the demographics of Wales as a whole. The results are in the process of being analysed with a view to developing a strategy to increase representation where it is lacking.

We have continued to review our recruitment processes and have delivered recruitment training to staff in Central Services who take part in recruitment panels to ensure our processes are inclusive and attract a diverse pool of applicants. There was a positive response in terms of the number of applicants from underrepresented groups to the range of recruitment campaigns for permanent staff.

We have continued to connect and work with a wide range of partners, including the Welsh Government, non-governmental and third-sector organisations, to help inform and provide critical reflection on our work. We have liaised with organisations representing the interests of learners and educators from those living in poverty, Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic, Gypsy Roma Traveller and LGBTQ+ backgrounds and communities. For example, a representative from the GRT community delivered a presentation to all staff on their work to break down barriers to education with community members.

In 2025-2026, we recruited new non-executive directors. Our initial recruitment campaign was not successful in recruiting a diverse set of non-executive directors. We decided to co-opt Ravi Pawar, ex-headteacher, to our board of non-executive directors.

We are in the process of reviewing our complaints procedure and the underlying equality impact assessment.

However:

We ran a recruitment campaign designed to help diversify our pool of lay inspectors, targeting several relevant organisations, schools with known ethnic minority intake and contacts to encourage engagement. All promotional communications and the recruitment pack noted that we particularly welcomed applications from diverse backgrounds to ensure varied perspectives and lived experiences. However, we did not attract a diverse range of applicants.

Although we attracted a good range of applicants as part of external recruitment campaigns, this did not result in successfully diversifying our workforce in terms of our diversity of ethnic background. We will seek a range of feedback and consider what more we can do in our recruitment process, drawing on best practice to help inform future improvements.

Equality Objective 2: We will promote equal opportunities and ensure fair treatment for our entire workforce, staff and contracted inspectors, tackling bullying and discrimination whenever it occurs

We said we will:

- develop our programme of staff training and development to promote equality and tackle discrimination
- continue mandatory equality and bullying awareness training during staff induction
- work with staff with a disability to ensure appropriate workplace adjustments
- develop reverse mentoring and coaching opportunities with community leaders

- ensure staff include equality objectives in performance management
- focus on inclusive line management
- develop and promote our staff wellbeing strategy

Progress so far:

All newly recruited staff undergo mandatory bullying and harassment training during their induction.

In 2025-2026, we ran a whole staff conference to shape Estyn's values and how our behaviours should mirror them. During this process, we intentionally focused on behaviours that promote equality and tackle discrimination, bullying and harassment in all its forms. We are in the process of devising further training for all staff, including new starters, on our public sector equality duty (PSED).

Several key staff received training on the PSED and how to carry out equality impact assessments (EIAs) of our policies, frameworks and thematic review project plans.

We are currently piloting reverse mentoring between our senior team and junior central services staff to increase understanding and develop an inclusive working environment. Initial impressions suggest that this is going well to date, but there will be a formal evaluation in 2026.

We published guidance for our internal and external workforce to consider professional behaviours, appropriate workplace conduct and power dynamics between inspectors and providers' staff and how this should shape our interactions on inspection. Further training is being developed and will be rolled out to internal and external inspectors during 2026-2027.

Our People Team support staff with a disability on an ongoing basis. This work includes making reasonable workplace adjustments guided by advice from occupational health.

We worked with staff to develop our [Wellbeing Strategy](#), which sets out what we already do and additional actions planned for the next three years focused on five pillars of well-being - mental, physical, financial, occupational and social well-being. It aims to:

- Attract new people to the organisation
- Create a healthier, more inclusive culture
- Boost resilience and engagement leading to increased retention
- Reduce sickness absence
- Ensure colleagues feel able to talk openly and feel supported with their well-being

However:

- Our work to review our performance management arrangements didn't progress as quickly as we hoped. We have asked Assistant Directors to discuss our revised values and behaviours as part of performance management discussions in summer 2026 and will roll out these discussions with all staff during the year.
- We have undertaken restructuring within our central services teams, so we paused our plan to carry out inclusive line management training, which we will roll out once all staff in the new structure are in place.

Equality Objective 3: We will evaluate issues relating to equality, diversity, and inclusion during inspection and in our thematic work, sharing good practice and making recommendations for improvement where needed

We said we will:

- include a cross-cutting theme relating to provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller learners
- collect demographic data in partner surveys
- ensure inspections consider barriers to recruitment onto educational programmes
- review guidance or toolkits to support inspectors evaluating equality issues
- collect and promote examples of effective equality, diversity and inclusion practice
- work with Medr and Welsh Government to improve national equality data sets
- strengthen lead inspector capacity to support equality work
- develop an anti-poverty strategy supporting equal opportunities for learners
- evaluate the strengths and areas for development when inspecting schools' approaches to mitigating the impact of poverty.
- establish a regular session on poverty during professional learning weeks
- develop an anti-poverty self-evaluation toolkit for schools

Progress so far:

Our annual report for 2024-25, launched in February 2026, included both promising practice and persistent challenges in supporting Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils. Strong provision was characterised by an inclusive, anti-racist culture, trusted relationships with families, culturally responsive curriculum and support, and effective partnership working with local authorities and Traveller Education Services to improve attendance and engagement. However, we identified that support remains inconsistent across Wales, with weaknesses in

transition, limited cultural representation, gaps in tracking progress and incomplete ethnicity data. Sustained improvement will depend on strategic leadership, better use of data and a long-term commitment to equity.

Where identified, we continued to include spotlights about relevant effective practice. For example, we highlighted how [St. Nicholas CIW Primary School](#) and [Inspection report Cwmffrwdroer Primary School 2025](#) were promoting an anti-racist culture.

We carried out pilots to incorporate demographic questions into pre-inspection questionnaires. From November 2025, these questions were added to primary and secondary school inspections (all automated). The responses go into the database, are not made available to inspectors for individual inspections, to avoid the risk of identifying individuals. We have also added questions to the questionnaires for FE inspections. The aim is to be able to monitor equality trends across sectors and over time.

As part of our review of leadership roles, we strengthened our capacity relating to equality and diversity from one to two lead officers and made it a focus for one of the new senior HMI roles. We reviewed our inspection reports for reports on equality, diversity and inclusive practices to inform our review of our guidance to support inspectors evaluating equality issues. We plan to continue redrafting this guidance from April 2026, as part of a wider strategy to support providers to develop their inclusive practices in consultation with Welsh Government and third-sector organisations.

We carried out a short survey to assess HMI needs regarding well-being and trauma-informed practice, aiming to tailor future professional learning sessions in the future.

We developed our anti-poverty strategy, and our work to evaluate the strengths and areas for development when inspecting schools' approaches to mitigating the impact of poverty is ongoing. There has been a review of how well our evidence bases on inspection reflect the evaluation and effectiveness of the pupil development grant.

Our professional learning weeks forward programme includes a regular session on poverty for all HMI.

In discussion with Welsh Government and Medr, we hosted two anti-racist summits which brought together key leaders from the education system to consider what more could be done to deliver the ambitions in the Anti-racist Wales Action Plan. This considered barriers to attracting a more diverse education workforce.

We considered barriers to recruitment onto education programmes in a few ways during the last year. Our report [Literacy, numeracy and digital skills in adult learning in the community - Estyn](#) explored barriers adult learners faced in accessing provision. In both our inspections of FE colleges, we reported on the targeted support for transition for certain groups of learners, for example, refugees and asylum seekers. We included a spotlight in one college inspection report about the work with a local sensory service to support learners with hearing and visual impairments. As part of our enhanced link inspector visits to apprenticeship providers, we identified themes regarding barriers to recruitment onto adult social care programmes (the largest apprenticeship programme). These barriers included pauses or reductions in recruitment activity, waiting lists due to delivery pressures, the Essential Skills Wales requirements and the fact that increasing numbers of ESOL learners struggled with technical terminology, formal written assessments and multiple-choice question formats. In a few cases, providers undertook additional ESOL support before apprenticeship sign-up because learners were not yet ready to access the full framework requirements.

However:

Although we started work to review our supplementary guidance on inspecting equality and human rights, we need to complete this work and promote its use with inspectors.

Through training and support, we have seen an increased focus in inspection on anti-poverty and anti-racist work. However, our focus on providers' work to support learners with other protected characteristics is less evident.

Our integrated equality impact assessments (EIAs)

This year we expanded the use of equality impact assessments to our thematic work. We trained all new thematic leads in the PSED and how EIAs support Estyn to ensure that our work meets this duty. Leads were trained in how to complete EIAs to ensure that they consider protected characteristics in the planning and delivery of thematic reviews. A process has been put in place require review by the Equality and Wellbeing group before senior sign off. The first completed EIAs have been submitted.

Areas of future focus added to our Strategic Equality Plan

Our work this year has identified further areas of focus for the final two years of our strategic equality plan, which have been incorporated into our updated plan.

- As a result of our training on the PSED and EIAs, we are in the process of reviewing our induction training to ensure that it includes a refresher on the PSED for all new inspectors.
- Roll out training on professional behaviours, power dynamics and appropriate workplace conduct to all HMI and external inspectors.
- We will finalise our new supplementary guidance to support the inspection of equality and diversity in providers, including more practical guidance and questions for inspectors.
- Revise our supplementary guidance to support the inspection of English and Welsh as an additional language
- We will target our recruitment campaign for cohort four of our ethnic minority leaders programme to a small number of sectors to fill the remaining three places. We will work with Dysgu to explore how we can work in partnership to scale the programme.
- As part of our well-being strategy, we will provide mental health awareness training for all colleagues
- Strengthen how we apply EIAs to our thematic reviews and any changes made as part of our mid-cycle review of inspection arrangements.
- Carry out a thematic review of anti-racism in schools and PRUs
- Explore what training needs we have as an organisation in relation to neurodiversity
- Upgrade our Disability Confidence status to level 3
- Consider how we can more explicitly consider barriers to recruitment, access or entry onto apprenticeship programmes as we develop our new inspection arrangements for 2027.
- Consider how we can promote work in relation to the LGBTQ+ action plan through our work.

Annex A - Workforce and Recruitment data

In the graphs below:

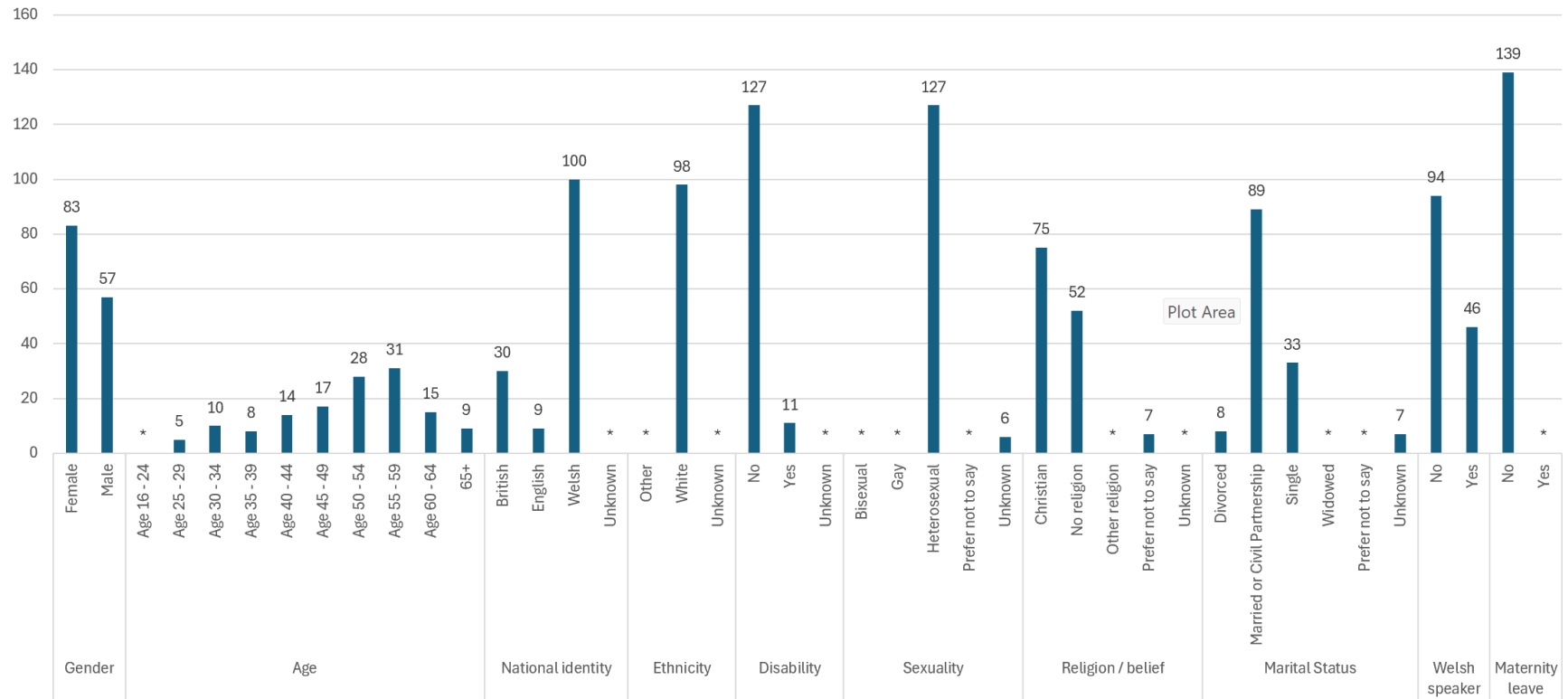
- 'Unknown' means no response was provided
- 'Prefer not to say' means the question was actively declined.

To protect confidentiality, figures below five are suppressed (*.)

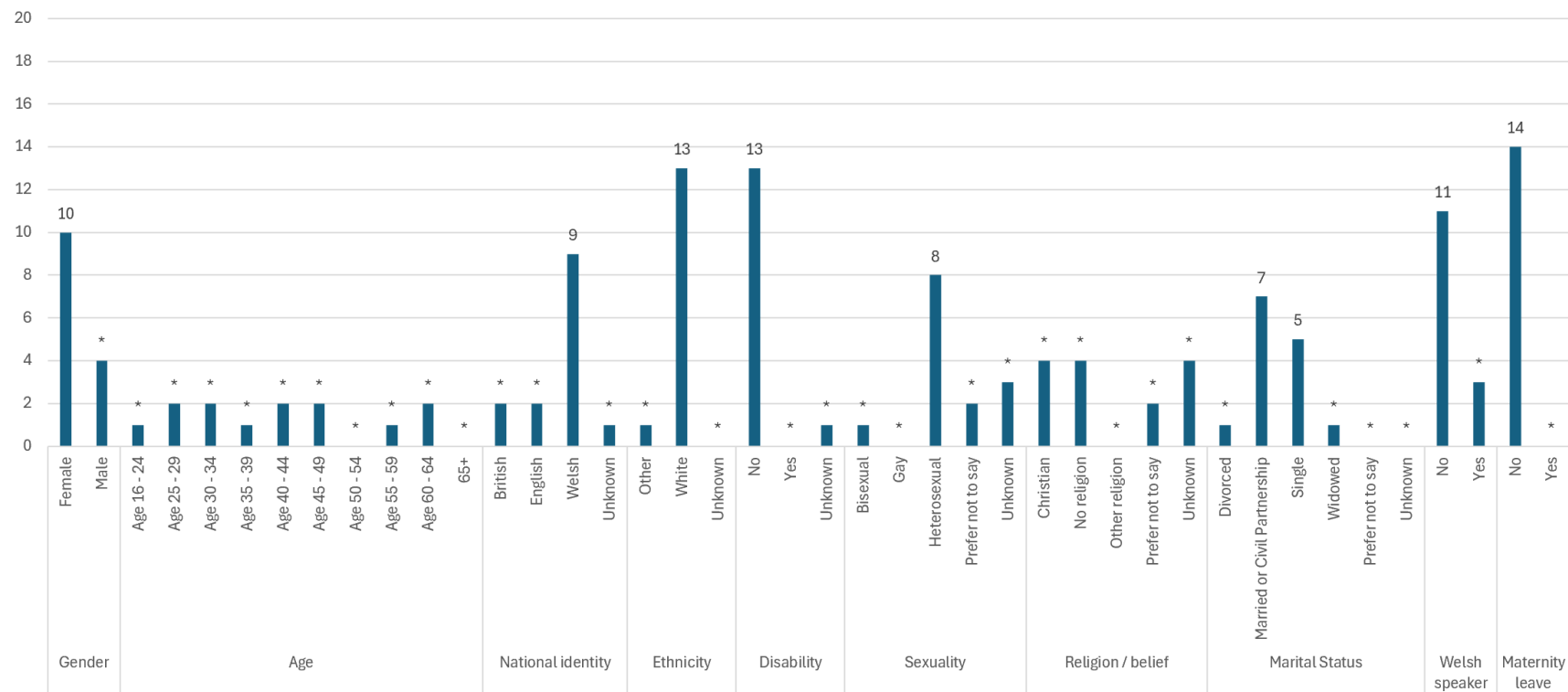
We encourage staff to update personal information in our HR system. Sharing this information is entirely voluntary.

The data on recruitment refers to all candidates applying for roles that have been advertised via external channels. Recruitment data is taken from our online recruitment system and is self-declared.

Demographics of current staff employed by Estyn on 31 March 2026



Demographics of employees who left Estyn between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026



Demographics of people who have applied for jobs with Estyn between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026

