



## Contents

CEO and Convener’s foreword..... 5

Equality Advisory Panel’s foreword ..... 7

## Chapter 1 – About the Cairngorms National

**Park Authority ..... 9**

Our purpose ..... 9

Our vision ..... 9

Our mission ..... 9

Our principles..... 10

National Park Partnership Plan 2022-2027..... 10

Corporate Plan for 2023–2027 ..... 12

Cairngorms 2030 programme..... 12

Park Authority Board ..... 13

## Chapter 2- Mainstreaming equality within the Cairngorms National Park Authority..... 15

Section 1: Engagement and participation..... 15

**Equality Advisory Panel (EAP) ..... 15**

**Lived experience panel ..... 16**

**Equality Advocacy group..... 17**

**Schools and young people ..... 18**

**Outdoor learning travel grants ..... 18**

**Youth employment strategy..... 19**

**Rural skills ..... 20**



Your Future Here – Careers in the Cairngorms .....	20
Cairngorms Youth Action Team (CYAT) .....	20
Rangers support in schools.....	21
Junior Ranger project.....	21
<b>Volunteering .....</b>	<b>22</b>
Volunteer Rangers .....	22
Volunteer experience programme.....	24
Health Walks .....	25
<b>Community engagement .....</b>	<b>26</b>
The Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) programme .....	26
Active communities .....	28
Cycle Friendly Cairngorms.....	29
Deer larder launch .....	29
Local Development Plan.....	29
<b>Staff engagement .....</b>	<b>30</b>
Staff Consultative Forum (SCF) .....	30
Equality monitoring survey .....	31
Best Companies survey .....	32
Peer Support Networks.....	32
Equalities partnerships .....	33
<b>Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Equality Forum.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Section 2: Corporate functions and processes .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Equality impact assessment .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Grant funding.....</b>	<b>34</b>
Rangers .....	34
Third party.....	35
Cairngorms Trust .....	35
Community Led Vision (CLV) Fund .....	38
Climate Adaptation Capital Fund.....	39
<b>Procurement .....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Corporate communications.....</b>	<b>40</b>
Branding and publications.....	40
Digital engagement.....	41
Meetings / campaigns.....	42



Section 3: Service provision .....	42
<b>Planning service</b> .....	<b>42</b>
<b>Recreation and outdoor access</b> .....	<b>43</b>
Statutory duties .....	43
Path investment .....	44
Community path leaflets.....	45
Visitor infrastructure.....	45
<b>Gathering evidence</b> .....	<b>46</b>
Community grants programme .....	46
Consultations.....	46
Events .....	46
Visitor and residents survey .....	47
<b>Leadership and staff awareness</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Equality training .....	47
E-learning .....	47
LGBTQ+ Charter .....	48
New policies .....	50
<b>Recruitment</b> .....	<b>51</b>
Equal opportunities monitoring in recruitment.....	52
<b>Chapter 3 - Our staff .....</b>	<b>54</b>
Employee data .....	54
Flexible working .....	55
Maternity leave (numbers) .....	56
Paternity leave (numbers) .....	56
Shared parental leave (numbers) .....	56
Staff development statistics.....	56
Gender pay gap – see Appendix 3 for full report.....	57
Occupational segregation .....	58
Board equality data .....	59
<b>Chapter 4 – Equality outcomes.....</b>	<b>60</b>



---

Section 1: Update on previous outcomes (detailed update table can be found in Appendix 5) .....	60
<b>Outcome 1</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>Outcome 2</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Outcome 3</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Outcome 4</b> .....	<b>64</b>
<b>Cairngorms 2030 contribution to the delivery of the Outcomes</b> .....	<b>65</b>
Section 2: Equality outcomes 2025 – 2029 (summary of outcome and evidence, with full outcome action plan set out in Appendix 6) .....	67
<b>Equality outcome 1</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>Equality outcome 2</b> .....	<b>69</b>
<b>Equality outcome 3</b> .....	<b>73</b>



# Cairngorms National Park Authority's Public Sector Equality Duty Report 2025-2029

## CEO and Convener's foreword

This report is a compilation of our equality, diversity and inclusion work over the last two years. This is a collaborative document, with contributions by a large number of different staff on the work they have done to mainstream equalities. Our ethos is that equality is everyone's business, and a fundamental thread running through all we do.

The last two years have seen some impressive equalities work and there have been several key highlights:

- We developed a Lived Experience Panel which compliments the great work that our Equality Advisory Panel (EAP) continues to deliver.
- In collaboration with staff and Board, we developed a new set of organisational principles – Passion and dedication, Community, Pioneering, Inspiring leadership, which support a cultural drive toward equalities and an organisational community of openness, respect and inclusivity.
- We developed innovative new policies, including support for neurodiversity, support for staff undergoing fertility treatment, menstrual health and endometriosis support as well as pregnancy loss.
- We have delivered a large number of inclusive community engagement events through the Cairngorms 2030 programme.
- We have invested in improved visitor infrastructure via grant aid which has included delivering not just standard accessible / disabled toilets as a minimum level of provision but also investment in an additional Changing Places toilet.



- We achieved LGBTQ+ Charter accreditation at Foundation level.

These are just a snapshot of our successes, with many more set out in this document. We acknowledge this is a comprehensive document, but we are eager to share the full breadth of our work. We plan to share the stories of our equalities work in interactive, visual media over the coming year.

We have achieved many of the targets we set out to achieve but realise we cannot become complacent. We remain convinced of the importance of investing staff time, and leadership with the knowledge that as we deliver the National Park Partnership Plan this is strengthened when we engage and involve as wide a section of the population as possible.

People and nature thriving together is the long-term vision for the Cairngorms National Park. That means we must engage as many people as possible, which is what we have been doing over the past two years covered by this report, and will continue to do over the coming years.



Grant Moir, CEO Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)



Sandy Bremner, Board Convener Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA)



## Equality Advisory Panel's foreword

As a member of the Cairngorms Equality and Inclusion Advisory Panel (EAP) for approximately five years I have been impressed and encouraged with the approach and importance the Cairngorms National Park Authority takes to mainstreaming equality and inclusion within their developing strategies, projects and operational plans. The range of projects within Cairngorms 2030 is inspiring and the EAP has been presented with real (and timely) opportunities to scrutinise these plans, offer advice and signpost to best practice in equality legislation.

Opportunities to engage in such an open and constructive manner are rare and in my experience the Park Authority is an exemplar in tackling equality issues across their work. This includes contentious and sensitive topics while ensuring people and place remain at the core of their plans, projects and actions.

I have been impressed with the appetite to engage meaningfully and the willingness to listen and develop plans informed by the knowledge and lived experience of EAP members. We turn up because we know our voice matters and will inform and influence the work of the Board. We have benefitted from being involved at the early stages in advising project officers to ensure equality and inclusion lies at the heart of projects. I truly feel this has resulted in better project outcomes that will make our National Park more accessible and welcoming for everyone.

Personally, I have found the team at the Park Authority to be excellent at ensuring projects deliver the requirements of statutory regulations such as the Equality Act 2010, the Public Sector Equality Duty and other legislation. It's encouraging to see equality and inclusion so firmly embedded in their corporate planning process and to work with a team focussed on going beyond minimum requirements.



Linda Bamford (she / her), member of the Cairngorms National Park Authority's Equality Advisory Panel (EAP)







## Chapter 1 – About the Cairngorms National Park Authority

The Cairngorms National Park Authority was established in 2003. The Cairngorms National Park is the UK's largest national park and covers five local authority areas. It is home to 18,000 residents and welcomes two million visitors each year. Nearly half of the National Park is considered wild land, and it contains one quarter of Scotland's native forest and a quarter of the rare and endangered species in the UK.

The Park Authority was set up to ensure the unique aspects of the Cairngorms, both the natural environment and local communities, are cared for, sustained, and enhanced for current and future generations to enjoy.

### Our purpose

The purpose of the Cairngorms National Park Authority is to promote partnership working and give leadership to all bodies and agencies involved in the sustainable growth and development of the Cairngorms National Park. Through coordinating development and collective agreement of the Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP), the Park Authority aims to ensure the collective and co-ordinated delivery of the four aims of the National Park, which are:

1. To conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage of the area
2. To promote sustainable use of the natural resources of the area
3. To promote understanding and enjoyment (including enjoyment in the form of recreation) of the special qualities of the area by the public
4. To promote sustainable economic and social development of the area's communities

### Our vision

An outstanding national park, enjoyed and valued by everyone, where nature and people thrive together.

### Our mission

1. Bringing people together towards a common purpose



2. Enhancing the National Park for everyone
3. Inspiring new generations to be national park champions

## Our principles

A year-long programme of activity across the organisation and board in 2024 has resulted in the development and adoption of a new set of Principles, supporting a cultural drive toward equalities and an organisational "Community" of openness, support, respect and inclusivity.

The newly developed principles are

1. Passion and dedication
2. Community
3. Pioneering
4. Inspiring leadership

Appendix 1 sets out what is meant by each principle

## National Park Partnership Plan 2022-2027

The National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues. Following an extensive consultation, through which nearly 1,500 people responded to the consultation, the NPPP for the period 2022-2027 was approved by our Board in June 2022 and signed off by Ministers.

The full plan can be accessed in the following link:

[Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2022-27](#)

The nature and climate crisis is at the core of the new Cairngorms NPPP, which sets out how we will look after the National Park and how we develop and deliver a well-being economy that works for the people of the Cairngorms whilst also restoring nature and delivering net zero.

The Cairngorms NPPP focuses on the three core areas of nature, people and place.

1. **Nature**



The Cairngorms is the UK's largest national park, home to one quarter of the UK's rare and endangered species. We'll take action to protect and enhance the area's natural heritage. Priorities Include:

- a) Going beyond net zero
- b) Expanding woodland
- c) Restoring peatland
- d) Helping habitats thrive
- e) Reducing deer Impacts
- f) Managing land sustainably
- g) Green Investment

## 2. **People**

We want people and nature to thrive together in the Cairngorms National Park. To achieve this, we will develop and support a local economy that works for all our communities. Priorities include:

- a) A thriving population
- b) Focusing on wellbeing
- c) Developing green jobs
- d) Being a Park for All
- e) Empowering communities
- f) Improving people's health
- g) Supporting volunteers

## 3. **Place**

Anyone that wishes to live in, work in or visit the National Park should be able to do so, but we recognise that a number of barriers still exist. We will tackle them through:

- a) More affordable housing
- b) Transforming transport
- c) Connecting communities
- d) Reducing tourism impacts
- e) Welcoming visitors
- f) Helping communities thrive
- g) Celebrating cultural heritage



## Corporate Plan for 2023–2027

The Corporate Plan was developed in the context of the Ministerial approved National Park Partnership Plan 2022–2027. The Corporate Plan sets out how the Park Authority will help to deliver the NPPP and will also continue to strive to be the best small public body in Scotland.

Our ambition is set out across the three themes of the NPPP and the Corporate Plan sets out the role of the National Park Authority in helping to deliver the objectives set out in that document. This is underpinned by our corporate functions and communications and engagement work.

The detailed Corporate Plan can be accessed in the following link:

[233024 CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITYBdPaper2 Annex1DraftCorporatePlan.pdf \(cairngorms.co.uk\)](#)

## Cairngorms 2030 programme

If we're going to be successful in delivering the Cairngorms NPPP, we need to change the way we do things. Our Cairngorms 2030 programme is central to this. Inspired by the Gaelic word *dùthchas*, meaning the deep-rooted connection between people and nature, the programme puts the power to tackle the climate and nature crises in the hands of people who live, work, and visit here. Across 20 long-term projects, Cairngorms 2030 will bring about transformational and inclusive change in the Cairngorms, benefiting health and wellbeing, delivering on climate change, and enhancing nature across the National Park. Cairngorms 2030 is an unprecedented partnership of over 70 organisations and is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

In particular, the £43 million Cairngorms 2030 programme will focus on:

- a) Putting residents at the heart of decision-making and giving them more say in future funding decisions.
- b) Working with land managers to explore new ways of managing land, as well as restoring and enhancing large areas of peatland and woodland.
- c) Working with communities and partners to improve public transport and better connect the National Park.
- d) Developing an economy that benefits people and nature, and providing green solutions to public health issues including social isolation and dementia.



The programme development phase started in October 2021 and ran to August 2023. The delivery phase commenced in January 2024 and will run to December 2028.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund have six priority outcomes, of which the first one is “a wider range of people will be involved in heritage”. In the delivery phase the engagement team continue to trial different models of engagement with communities and individuals; with a particular focus on connecting with hard to reach groups, identifying barriers that will prevent people from being able to engage, and finding ways to overcome these barriers. Included in the programme are projects to develop new active and sustainable travel options in the National Park, with underlying design principles that every development will be accessible to all users. Other projects include developing NHS partnerships focused on green health referrals and supporting a new outdoor dementia resource centre to ensure that participation in nature activities is widened to be as inclusive as possible. More information about some of these projects is set out in this document.

### Park Authority Board

The role of the Park Authority Board is to agree long term objectives for the National Park through the NPPP and to set the priorities of work for the Park Authority. In addition to approving the strategic direction of the organisation, the Board is also responsible for ensuring high standards of governance, monitoring and overseeing the delivery of agreed objectives and compliance with statutory responsibilities.

For details of our Board members go to [Park Authority Board - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#)

Nineteen members make up the Cairngorms National Park Authority Board:

- Seven members appointed by Scottish Ministers, to bring a national perspective to the Board and specific expertise from a range of subjects relevant to the National Park.
- Five members are elected locally, which brings to the Board the valuable perspective of the National Park’s local communities.
- Seven members are nominated by the five councils in the Cairngorms National Park. These members are expected to cement the key strategic relationships between the Park Authority and its partner local authorities:
  - Highland (2), Aberdeenshire (2), Moray (1), Angus (1), Perth and Kinross (1)



For the four years to 2023, the Board comprised 10 female and nine male members, achieving the 50:50 by 2020 gender equality target. However, 2023/24 brought changes as there were six new ministerial appointments, and there were also elections for the five elected positions. The board composition as of January 2025 is seven female and 12 male members.

For the ministerial appointments, the Park Authority has a role to play in identifying the skills gaps in the collective board. This is done through a skills survey that is self-populated by board members, and which feeds into a collective skills matrix that is shared with the Scottish Government Appointments Committee who are responsible for recruiting and appointing the ministerial appointments.

For the local elections, we arranged a number of public meetings in settlements across the National Park. In addition, we developed videos which showcased a variety of resident voices from across the National Park, speaking in their own words about why it was important to stand, and later vote, in the elections. The Highland Council (who were overseeing the elections) sent a Park Authority-designed door drop to every household in the National Park explaining the elections process and encouraging them to stand. This included a prominent headline saying, "We are seeking people from a wide range of backgrounds to apply". We included a full article on the elections process as part of Cairn magazine, which is a Park Authority designed and written magazine that is sent to every household in the National Park. This included a specific section of the article exploding myths about the 'type of person' who usually applies and why we're keen to broaden it out. Our press release used the same kind of language. We created a series of simple 'explainers' on social media to breakdown the process of standing and voting into plain English. We also worked with the Highland Council to ensure the whole elections process was broadcast live on YouTube, helping demystify the process of voting / standing in elections of this type.

There were a total of 20 candidates for these five places. Of the 20 candidates 60% were men and 40% were women (in comparison to 75% male and 25% female at the last elections in 2019). The final outcome was that of the five elected members, three were men and two were woman (in comparison to 2019 when two men and three women were elected).



## Chapter 2 - Mainstreaming equality within the Cairngorms National Park Authority

This section of the report demonstrates what the Park Authority has been doing to mainstream the equality duty into our daily work. It details how we have integrated this into our natural thinking, planning and delivery cycle. We have split this into three sections:

- Engagement and participation
- Corporate function and processes
- Service provision

### Section 1: Engagement and participation

#### **Equality Advisory Panel (EAP)**

The Park Authority established an external Equality Advisory Panel in 2020. The aim of the panel is to provide informed, evidence-based feedback, guidance, and advice to support the Cairngorms National Park Authority to:

- ensure statutory public sector equality duties are delivered in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 (and other relevant equality legislation);
- embed equality and inclusion in their strategies and corporate processes;
- critically assess and appropriately mitigate the impact of Cairngorms National Park Authority decisions on equality groups through robust equality impact assessment procedures;
- ensure best practice in equality and inclusion approaches to their work;
- promote equality and inclusion work of Cairngorms National Park Authority and partners within the National Park.

The panel is chaired by Hannah Grist, the Cairngorms National Park Authority's board equalities champion. It comprises 16 members, representing expertise and enthusiasm across a variety of equalities specialisms. Members are volunteers and recruited through an open recruitment process. The panel meets virtually every month and had its first face to face meeting in September 2022.

For details of the panel and its membership, go to [Equality Advisory Panel - Cairngorms National Park Authority](#).



Over the last 12 – 18 months, the panel has made significant contributions by:

- a) advising on the priorities and accessibility considerations for the new Park Authority website.
- b) advising on the wording and content of several new policies, including the Gender Diversity Policy; Neurodiversity Policy; and Supporting Staff Through Pregnancy Loss Policy.
- c) advising on the most appropriate wording for the equalities monitoring section of both the Visitor Survey and the Resident Survey.
- d) advising on the most accessible ways to distribute the surveys, so as to best capture data across the equalities groups.
- e) hearing about and contributing to the consultation on developing a Park Pride Festival in 2025.
- f) advising on the Active Cairngorms Action Plan; the Old Logging Way Action Plan and the Core Paths Plan review.
- g) consulting on and informing the development of the equality outcomes (2025–2029) for the Park Authority.

In March 2024, the EAP participated in training led by Talat Yaqoob, an independent consultant, trainer and social researcher. Talat is also Co-chair of the First Minister's Advisory Council on Women and Girls, whose work focuses on intersecting inequalities, women's inequality and anti-racism. The session discussed what intersectionality is and how it applies to work related to equality and diversity. It focussed on the practical application of developing policies, programmes and services for those who experience multiple inequalities, and thereby helped provide an understanding of the concepts and also generated ideas for how the EAP could take this forward.

### **Lived experience panel**

Working closely with industry experts Talat Yaqoob and Iffat Shahnaz, the Park Authority has created a lived experience group as part of its Cairngorms 2030 programme, supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The group is made up of between 10 and 15 people from a range of ethnic minority backgrounds who do not have equal access to opportunity or influence. This group is made up of individuals who would like to be more involved in the National Park and with the Park





Authority's work, but who do not have a history of (or experience in) engagement in the outdoors.

The purpose of the group is to influence the work of the Park Authority and its partners through the Cairngorms 2030 programme, to ensure we better deliver for the often overlooked communities that group members are from. Our aim is for the group to feel empowered to push for change and inclusion both within the programme and across the National Park as a whole.

The group will work over a longer-term period to provide an ongoing space for consultation, influence and co-production on Cairngorms 2030 activities (both internally and externally), and indeed wider Park Authority / partner activities. They sit alongside our Equality Advisory Group and provide personal insight into particular aspects of our EDI work.

### **Equality Advocacy group**

The Park Authority established an internal equality, diversity and inclusion advocacy group in November 2021 comprising staff. With the overarching purpose to champion the integration of equality, diversity and inclusivity principles into daily working life at the Cairngorms National Park Authority at an organisational level, it has contributed significantly to enhancing the organisation's approach to equality and diversity.

The group has evolved since it was first established and underwent a review in 2024. As a result of the review and approved terms of reference, the operational principles identified that the group will:

- establish a space where members can comment on matters covered by the remit of the group, fully confident that contributions will remain confidential, and that diverse perspectives and opinions will be respected at all times.
- maintain a supportive space in which members of minority groups feel able to share their experiences if they wish to, and all group members feel that their contributions are valued, encouraged and listened to.
- operate as an advocacy group to feed into the development, implementation and embedding of equality, diversity and inclusion actions within the organisation.
- report observations, thoughts and recommendations into the formal governance and consultative structures of the organisation.



Over the last 12-18 months, the group has had a key role to play in:

- a) identifying and supporting the development of several new equalities and wellbeing policies, including Supporting Staff Through Pregnancy Loss Policy; Neurodiversity Policy; Reasonable Adjustments Passport Policy; Gender Diversity Policy. Menstrual Health and Endometriosis Support Policy; Fertility Treatment Policy.
- b) supporting the development and delivery of the action plan to achieve accreditation of the LGBTQ+ Charter at Foundation Level, which was awarded to the Park Authority in May 2024.
- c) facilitated a training session on how to show leadership in ensuring we encourage inclusion.
- d) informed the inclusion and development of as well as the action plan for the Organisational Development Strategy theme of wellbeing, resilience and diversity.
- e) advised on how the Park Authority would promote Pride Month.
- f) advised on supporting the Park Authority's presence at the Inverness Pride festivals in 2023 and 2024.
- g) helped develop a new Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form, and an associated guidance note to support staff in undergoing the EqIA process.
- h) advising on several corporate EqIA's, including for the Active Cairngorms Action Plan, the Local Development Plan Evidence Report.

The organisation's equality lead has been invited to speak at several national equalities' conferences, sharing our approach to key equalities themes, including Neurodiversity in the Workplace; Menopause in the Workplace; Women's Health at Work.

## **Schools and young people**

### **Outdoor learning travel grants**

The Cairngorms Outdoor Learning Travel Grant continues to be very successful enabling people to visit the National Park who wouldn't ordinarily have the chance to do so. The grant is available to educational organisations, voluntary and community groups.

In 2023/24 a total of 47 grants were awarded totalling £12,800 across 35 primary schools, 10 secondary schools and two voluntary groups.



In 2024/25 a total of 34 grants have been awarded totalling £8,727 across 19 primary schools, 12 secondary schools and three voluntary groups.

The main activities that take place are schools outdoor learning sessions and residentials as well as days out connecting to nature for health benefits.

### **Youth employment strategy**

The Park Authority is committed to supporting young people into employment and has formally adopted a youth employment strategy. In January 2022, we also signed up to the [Young Person's Guarantee](#), through which we have committed to creating and supporting a variety of opportunities for young people who are trying to establish their careers. The support we have provided in the last 12-18 months includes:

- a) We recruited two graduate trainee accountant posts in 2022. Both were short term contracts, but both were converted to permanent contracts.
- b) We have supported several internships, including in 2024 a six-month GIS internship; a six-month content creation internship and two four-month internships which were recruited directly through Black Professionals UK and supported two young people from an Ethnic minority background. One of our interns has used the experience to successfully secure a promoted position to a permanent role within the organisation
- c) We have supported several careers events at local high schools and had a stand at the Your Future Here careers event, which showcased local employment opportunities in the National Park. Through this event we hosted two week-long work experience placements, which the young people had to apply and be interviewed for.
- d) We hosted two additional young people on work experience placements, one of whom worked with our Admin team one day / week during term time, and another with our IT team, to increase their confidence and skills.
- e) We employed four trainee rangers in 2023 and also in 2024. In addition to getting experience in rangers skills, they also received training on transferable skills to enhance their employability. In 2021 we hosted four trainee rangers through the Kickstart programme. Two of the four returned in 2022 and 2023 as seasonal rangers, and both have gone on to secure promoted positions with the



Park Authority in 2024. The opportunity to be a trainee ranger is a key career pipeline to further conservation jobs.

- f) We have supported several university students with work placements, which give them a feel for the type of work the Park Authority carries out and appropriate career paths for this work; and supports mandatory work experience required to gain their qualifications.

### **Rural skills**

The Park Authority fund Countryside Learning Scotland (CLS) to employ a Pathways to Rural Work Regional Coordinator to deliver the Cairngorms “Pathways to Rural Work” initiative. The role works to increase awareness of, and access to, rural opportunities, qualifications, training and careers, to help reduce the attainment gap through providing greater school to work transition opportunities for pupils and students from all backgrounds and abilities. In the period April to October 2024 485 pupils from 12 secondary schools engaged with a Pathways to Rural Work event.

The Pathways to Rural Work initiative also raises awareness of and promotes the rural skills required to tackle the climate emergency.

### **Your Future Here – Careers in the Cairngorms**

As part of the wider work around wellbeing economy a rural careers event, sponsored by the Park Authority and organised by CLS, took place on 12 September 2024 in Aviemore. This was a move away from a traditional careers event with a focus on practical workshops and demonstrations, breakout spaces for one-to-one chats, as well as live job and training opportunities.

Around 170 senior pupils from seven high schools in and around the National Park attended the event along with over 200 young people who had already left school. 25 local businesses and organisations exhibited with interactive stalls, some delivered interactive workshops, demonstrations, and gave inspirational speeches. Several of the employers came along with job opportunities, some of which were successfully filled by a young person resulting from a conversation had at the event.

### **Cairngorms Youth Action Team (CYAT)**

Over the last two years, Cairngorms Youth Action Team (CYAT) have been very active, currently with 14 members aged 16-30 meeting regularly. CYAT hosted an international Youth Climate Camp in 2023, which was attended by youth from across the UK and Europe



(via EUROPARC and National Parks UK). They have run three rounds of Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) funding since 2023, awarding £49,949.04 to 52 youth projects, and run six under 30s volunteer days across the National Park as well as their own residential development weekend in 2024. CYAT also attended Scottish Parliament where they met the First Minister and presented their rural youth demands to cabinet ministers.

The work is youth-led and highly successful with benefits including improving the confidence and capabilities of group members. Their YLAG funding is helping young people across the National Park to grow, develop and access employment. CYAT have become national youth leaders: groups across Scotland look up to the example they set. CYAT have helped other YLAGs to form and develop across Scotland and their participation in rural youth networks is furthering the case for rural young people.

### **Rangers support in schools**

Over 2023-25 Cairngorms National Park Authority Rangers have delivered 77 sessions to primary schools and 10 sessions to secondary schools in the National Park. In total 1,395 primary school pupils and 186 secondary school pupils have taken part in the sessions. Topics have included responsible access, special qualities of the National Park, biodiversity and wildlife, literary landscapes and moorlands and climate change.

The benefits to pupils from these sessions are wide-ranging and they promote a sense of connection with nature and with the National Park. The sessions, especially Scottish Outdoor Access Code encourage pupils to become responsible citizens by fully exploring what is responsible behaviour in the outdoors. Sessions are flexible, which can accommodate different needs of individuals or classes, allowing everyone to take part.

Taking pupils outdoors, and away from their usual learning environment promotes different ways of learning and allows pupils to flourish in new ways.

### **Junior Ranger project**

The Cairngorms National Park Junior Ranger project is a programme of free outdoor learning opportunities open to 11-18 year olds. Its purpose is to create young advocates for the National Park through a mixed programme of conservation, adventure and learning activities delivered by over 40 different partners and co-ordinated by the Cairngorms National Park Authority ranger team.



A series of junior ranger discovery weeks continue to run in partnership with the six local secondary schools, engaging 96 pupils in 2024. Monthly programmes of extracurricular activity also run in two geographical areas of the National Park: Badenoch and Strathspey and Deeside.

A monthly programme of activity offered 25 sessions to 82 Junior Rangers, including a three day expedition through the Cairngorm plateau, where participants had the opportunity to work with landowners to conserve and experience some of the remote parts of the Cairngorms.

In 2024 the delivery partnership was made up of 34 partner organisations, with over 40 involved in the last three years. The dedication of these organisations to deliver high quality environmental opportunities to local young people is what keeps the Cairngorms National Park Junior Ranger project going from strength to strength.

## **Volunteering**

The Volunteer Cairngorms programme supports several strands of volunteering activity across the National Park. This includes:

1. Managing the Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Ranger programme.
2. Managing the Cairngorms National Park Volunteer Experience programme.
3. Managing the Cairngorms National Park Health Walks programme.
4. Supporting members of the public to become involved in volunteering for nature and the environment by collating information about opportunities with organisations across the National Park into our online database, allowing volunteers to sign up quickly and easily.
5. Supporting volunteer-involving organisations (including the Park Authority) to develop opportunities, and recruit and manage their own volunteers through new or existing programmes.

In this report, we focus on strands one, two and three.

### **Volunteer Rangers**

As part of the Volunteer Cairngorms programme, to date the Park Authority have recruited 91 Volunteer Rangers since 2017, 59 of those are currently active. They are a centrally coordinated team of volunteers, supporting partners across the National Park with a diverse range of tasks including visitor engagement, activity delivery, practical habitat restoration,



infrastructure maintenance and habitat monitoring. Between December 2024 and January 2025 an equality and diversity baseline survey was undertaken, with a response rate of 78%. Headlines of this include:

- a) 22% of respondents are aged under 35, 52% are aged 55 or over.
- b) Over half balance their volunteering with part time or full time work.
- c) One in five respondents have caring responsibilities and 9% are students.
- d) The majority report managing quite well or very well financially, however 9% reported not managing very well financially or having some difficulties.
- e) When asked if they experience barriers or limitations in day-to-day activities related to any health conditions (including mental health), physical, sensory or cognitive differences, 20% reported experiencing some / small barriers or limitations.
- f) 100% of the respondents who answered (96% of respondents overall) identified as white
- g) 54% of respondents responded their sex was female, 46% male.
- h) A small number of respondents stated 'prefer not to say' regarding gender, those that did answer responded in a way consistent with their response to 'sex'.
- i) 83% of respondents who answered our question about their sexual orientation identified as straight / heterosexual. 6% of respondents identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or in another way (LGBTQ+), whilst 11% preferred not to say.

We work to support those with changing abilities to remain involved in the programme, for example through the provision of static volunteering opportunities for those who are less physically mobile (eg supporting within a visitor centre or volunteering from home to support the programme).

We work to reduce barriers to the Volunteer Ranger role through covering the costs of travel to and from the opportunities; providing all clothing and equipment; and offering a range of opportunities from very short sessions to multi-day roles at a range of times of day and week. Given the scale of the National Park, we aim to offer opportunities across the area including training and social / celebration events. We also offer a range of sessions online for those less able to travel or with additional commitments. Where additional support needs are identified we work closely with our team to provide these, including information and training in appropriate formats and adapting our recruitment process.



Our Volunteer Ranger Team undertake a range of activities to support and engage those who may experience exclusion. This includes supporting the Alzheimer Scotland Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre with the delivery of activities; supporting the delivery of the Volunteer Experience programme (see following section) and with volunteer events for those aged under 30.

Our ambition is to increasingly diversify our Volunteer Ranger team during the course of the Cairngorms 2030 programme. We intend to do this through working in partnership with groups and organisations working with under-represented groups during our recruitment periods, as well as connecting with our existing activities (eg CYAT; Volunteer Experience programme; Junior Rangers) to encourage them to see the Volunteer Ranger programme as a 'next step' in their engagement journey.

### **Volunteer experience programme**

The Volunteer Experience programme facilitates volunteering opportunities for individuals, families and groups that normally would not be able to experience the National Park and what it can offer. This may be because of economic disadvantages, challenging lifestyles, health issues or isolation, and often features vulnerable groups.

Our Volunteer Experience programme is designed to create safe and positive spaces in nature for third sector and charity groups. Our partners for this programme include Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre Perth and Kinross (RASAC), Home Start East Highland, (families facing economic difficulties and challenging lifestyles), and Aberdeen Asylum and Refugee Care.

Since June 2022, monthly experiences have been arranged for groups to enjoy a 'day with a purpose', from building paths, making insect hotels, fence line work, recording wildlife, and ring barking to create capercaillie habitat. In 2024 there were 169 participant places filled, across 12 sessions.

Feedback from charity partners and attendees has been very positive, with reports of better sleep patterns, mood and interest from participants in working in the environmental sector. Some feedback anonymously collected by the charity and third sector partners:

- "What an amazing piece of the universe for a group of injured women to commune in. I felt... that I could breathe deeply again – Thank You!"
- "This is the first time in two years I've been able to take my kids out to something – we all had a great day learning about bugs and wildlife."





- “This is so good for me as you are seeing all the wonderful things around you rather than thinking about things that have had a negative effect on you.”

### **Health Walks**

Health Walks are short, safe, local, low-level walks supporting the inactive to become more active, improving mental and physical health and wellbeing. There are 12 active Health Walks across the National Park, with over 60 volunteer Health Walk Leaders. Over 100 health walkers attend the walks each week, some walks ranging from short 10 minute strolls to a gentle one hour walk.

With the support of Paths for All the Park Authority coordinate the walks and the volunteers who lead them. Recent feedback from our new walker feedback survey includes:

- The chatting as we walk and the socialising with a cup of coffee afterwards means I look forward to [the walk]
- I love the walking group. The leaders are very considerate of everyone's needs and safety but still manage to challenge us. It's a most relaxing and sociable time.
- The social side of the group is as important as the walking as it gives us a chance to meet and blether with a wide range of people whilst being out in the fresh air - whatever the weather.
- Being part of this group gives me confidence for me to walk in the woods and around my local area at other times of the week

Health Walks are open to all and we are working with a range of partners to encourage those with specific and / or long-term health conditions to take part. This includes:

- a) as part of the Cairngorms 2030 programme, employing two Green Health Link Workers who, working alongside the NHS Public Health Programme Manager facilitate a green prescription link between general practitioner (GP) surgeries and Health Walks in the Strathspey area. This is creating a pathway between GP surgery patients who may need physical support in getting back to health, and mental health or reduction in isolation.
- b) offering ‘dementia friendly’; ‘strength and balance’ and ‘all abilities inclusion’ training to all Health Walk Leaders.
- c) previous partnerships through Paths for All with Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH) and Macmillan.



## Community engagement

Engaging with communities is a significant part of the work of the Park Authority and one that has huge importance, both in terms of sharing information about our work, but also in terms of consulting with communities to gather views and opinions about our proposed work, plans and strategies.

### The Cairngorms 2030 (C2030) programme

The C2030 programme has increased our community engagement significantly, and through it we have developed several interventions to ensure our engagement is inclusive. In particular:

1. We developed standards of engagement for internal staff and external consultants who may be talking to stakeholders on our behalf. This incorporates our ethos, processes principles and includes our approach to equalities. It specifically focusses on our C2030 key principles of widening participation, codesign and outlines our key audiences, which includes a specific audience of underrepresented communities.
2. Linked to this, we have also developed a checklist for event management to support staff in delivering events to this high standard.
3. Four folding chairs and a set of handheld magnifying glasses and have been purchased which help make our events more accessible. For instance, the chairs can be utilised where there is an audience or staff member at an event who needs to sit. We place explanatory signs alongside the magnifying glasses and have had positive feedback from various events that highlight the magnifying glasses as a real support. Standing display boards are also used to enable a variety of heights of display.
4. Venue choices / venue directory – as part of C2030 we consider venue accessibility as a key priority while planning events and explore opportunities to mitigate venue limitations where possible. Information about event and venue accessibility is included as standard on all communications and invites to events. Where space limits this on posters, there is always a follow up link / contact details.

To assist this, an internal resource is being developed as a venue directory, which will then be an information base on how accessible different locations and



venues are across the area. All staff can then choose appropriate venues for their audience needs in the future.

5. Display standards – alongside the Communications team we have standardised the approach to posters and have gone through the minimum requirements for accessibility, legibility and style. Linked to this, staff have been supported to build displays and choose facilitation techniques which are accessible. These include how to make sure instructions are clear, using accessible language, and repeated. Displays are structured to ensure that audiences can engage with them in different ways.
6. Staff – any staff who are representing the organisation at events are given a full briefing which includes defibrillator and first aid kit grab bags.
7. Refreshments – dietary options are considered and fruit and non-caffeinated drinks are included as a standard. For staff themselves, accessibility is also considered a standard part of event planning.
8. Gamification work - as a test and learning opportunity in innovative methods of engagement, we have developed a project alongside the University of Edinburgh on a different way of running public consultations. We have managed the recruitment for this proactively, working with trusted partners who support those communities who experience multiple barriers to engagement, and removing those barriers where possible. For example, we have worked with the Care and Learning Alliance who have supported us to reach more working parents, and Community Connexions who support local people with disabilities. This is twofold, both building a long-term meaningful relationship with those partners and also reaching those currently furthest away from us. We use that learning from partners to help inform our practice. This included testing methodology to request as much demographic data as the individual applicant is comfortable giving to help ensure as diverse a range of voices as possible in the room. Feedback from partners will be built into future work in this area. This aims to ensure the opportunity is available to as many different communities as possible. As part of this work, participants are remunerated for their time, travel, and we have offered contribution towards dependent care costs. This was deliberately phrased as dependents, rather than child care costs.
9. Intelligent forward planning of events to ensure there are no geographic communities that drop off our agenda, including smaller communities. Some of



the communities in the Park Authority area have been identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as some of the most isolated. By bringing our work to them rather than requiring those communities to travel to our centralised events, we remove barriers to participation. As part of this, we also balance our presence at a variety of community events to ensure a range of audiences.

### **Active communities**

As part of Cairngorms 2030, we are seeking to put active and sustainable transport at the heart of a greener future for the National Park. We are working with some of our local communities to make it easier and safer for people to get around their village without a vehicle. By improving infrastructure and public spaces, we aim to make it more enjoyable for people to walk, cycle or get around using a wheelchair. A key part of this project has been community engagement, which involved online and hard copy engagement materials, online surveys, and in-person engagement via drop-in events, phone and e-mail.

Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs) have been progressed as part of all the Active Communities Concept Stage 2 design works. These have been developed for all the concept stage active travel interventions across the schemes proposed within the National Park and are required for all stages of design and construction. The EqIAs cover both the physical and social safety elements of the design, but also community engagement, especially engagement materials. As with broader community engagement, coordination with the Park Authority Engagement Team is required to manage the depth of engagement with any stakeholder group.

The consultants we work with are all required to:

- Review the prior EqIAs.
- Co-ordinate with the Park Authority Engagement Team prior to engaging groups with protected characteristics.
- Determine the specific equality impacts by proactively engaging groups with protected characteristics identified in previous EqIAs and stakeholder registers, including the Park Authority EAP, as well as referring to relevant national guidance.
- Provide an updated EqIA with appropriate actions defined in advance of progressing design works, and then demonstrably carried out during the design phase.



- Carry out the defined actions and provide a further updated EqIA recording details.

### **Cycle Friendly Cairngorms**

Through this Cairngorms 2030 project, five volunteers will achieve the Cycle Mechanic Velotech Bronze Award. Up to 50 bikes are being refurbished and made available to residents in the National Park. Bike safety check sessions are funded and planned to take place over eight events in each village in Strathspey during 2025. 24 school children will be reached to develop bike maintenance skills through several sessions offered to each primary school in Badenoch and Strathspey. There will also be visits to the local secondary schools to provide maintenance of school bike fleets.

### **Deer larder launch**

An innovative project, part of Cairngorms 2030, and which involves the Park Authority in partnership with local farming families, addresses damage to fragile habitats around parts of the National Park caused by deer densities, whilst also addressing issues around food poverty. Each of the two farms involved have been given a deer larder, from which deer culled in and around the National Park will be butchered. A significant proportion of the venison processed – including lean and easy to cook mince, meatballs, burgers and sausages – will be donated to foodbanks, local schools and community kitchens.

### **Local Development Plan**

The Park Authority have begun work on the next local development plan, which will cover a 10-year period beyond 2026. We are currently in the process of creating an evidence report, which is a new requirement involving the collation of baseline evidence that informs the creation of the next draft plan. An important part of this work is engagement and steps have been taken to ensure this engagement is equitable and inclusive.

An Equality and Fairer Scotland Impact Assessment was published in June 2023. This was informed by engagement with the Equality Advisory Panel and the Park Authority's staff Equality Advocacy Group. The impact assessment identified a number of measures to ensure that preparation of the Local Development Plan meets the duties of the Equality Act 2010 and Fairer Scotland Duty. These have been incorporated into the Local Development Plan's participation statement, which sets out how the Park Authority will engage on the Local Development Plan.



The participation statement recognised the need to engage with young people (under 25), disability groups, Gypsy / Traveller groups and this work is currently underway. To date, focused engagement has occurred with students at Grantown Grammar School and Kingussie High School, the CYAT and Gypsy / Traveller groups. Online engagement is ongoing and to date, three engagement exercises have been undertaken to gain views on the evidence base. As of February 2025, equalities data has been collected for the majority of the 103 responders. Further engagement will take place throughout 2025.

Results so far indicate that the majority of respondents are in the 45-54 age bracket, with the fewest respondents being aged 16-34. There are more male than female respondents, a very small number of LGBTQ+ respondents, and very few Black and Ethnic groups. 50% indicated no disability, 10% reported a disability, there were fairly large numbers on all equalities questions who chose not to answer the question, which indicates there is more work to be done in this area.

The preparation of the Local Development Plan is also integrated with work to prepare community action plans. This process aims to ensure that a broad section of the National Park's population is engaged and that the priorities set out within the action plans are integrated into the Local Development Plan.

## **Staff engagement**

### **Staff Consultative Forum (SCF)**

The SCF is the mechanism through which the Park Authority engages and consults with staff. It comprises six staff representatives, one of whom represents those staff who are members of the Prospect trade union. It is chaired by the Corporate Services Director and attended also by two board members and the external Prospect official. The terms of reference specify that staff across teams, and grades are represented, and that there is a gender balance of staff representatives. The SCF meets quarterly to undertake provision of information, consultation, and negotiation. Equality, leadership and health and safety are standing items on the agenda, and one of several mechanisms for staff to input their views, suggestions, or concerns about the Park Authority's approach to these matters.

Over the last 12-18 months, the SCF has discussed and informed the following:

- a) Annual staff pay awards.
- b) Staff survey results and emerging action plans.
- c) The Organisational Development Strategy.



- d) New policies, including: Neurodiversity Policy; Reasonable Adjustments Passport Policy; Gender Diversity Policy; Supporting Staff Through Pregnancy Loss Policy; Menstrual Health and Endometriosis Support Policy; Fertility Treatment Policy.
- e) Significant revisions to existing policies, including the Absence Management Policy; Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy; Dignity at Work Policy.

### **Equality monitoring survey**

The Park Authority invites staff to participate in an annual equality monitoring survey. Previously this anonymous survey was delivered via SurveyMonkey, but we recently changed our HR database, upgrading to an electronic one that allows staff to update their equality data directly on the database, and at any time. We have noticed the number and accuracy of reporting has increased since we implemented this electronic database.

In consultation with the EAP and internal equality group, we also added additional equality monitoring categories to increase representation eg we added “bi, pan or polysexual” as a separate category from “gay, lesbian and bisexual”. Whilst we could align directly with the census equality monitoring questionnaire, we have chosen to provide more options, as we recognise that the purpose of our equality monitoring is different to that of the census. We use the data to ensure our policies and procedures are as inclusive for all our staff as they can be, and therefore the more we know about our minority staff population, the more we can do to remove barriers to their inclusion. For example, data from a previous survey showed that some colleagues were not fully comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation with colleagues, their line managers and at work in general. As a result of this, we set up the Internal Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Advocacy Group, and signed up to the LGBTQ+ Charter.

Another example of how we have used the extended data gathered is that in recognition of the number of staff who identified as being neurodiverse, we developed a Neurodiversity Policy. Undeniably the data gathered through the staff equality monitoring survey has been used to establish inclusive policies and procedures.

The full set of staff and Board equality monitoring data is available in Appendix 2 and is further referenced in Chapter 3.



### **Best Companies survey**

The Park Authority engages in the biennial Best Companies staff survey, which assesses staff engagement across eight factors; leadership, my manager, my company, personal growth, giving something back, fair deal, wellbeing, my team. The analysis of the survey results informs the evolving organisational development strategy. Wellbeing has consistently been identified as a “shadow” area requiring improvement, and a number of interventions have been implemented as a result, eg implementation of Mental Health First Aid Policy; two-weekly wellbeing e-mails; promotion to staff to use their three paid days to engage in volunteering activities. The survey was most recently done in October 2023 and the Park Authority achieved “One star” status (a rating of One to watch is good; one star is very good; two stars is outstanding, and three stars is extraordinary).

The 2023/24 survey showed very positive staff engagement, with the highest scores in the last seven years for five of the eight factors - my manager; personal growth; my team; giving something back and wellbeing. We particularly welcomed the results for wellbeing, being the highest score we have ever had for this factor since commissioning this survey in 2012. We feel this indicates that the work we have delivered to improve staff wellbeing, as well as the move to hybrid working, and the reduction in contractual hours (from 37.5 to 36 in 2023 and 35 in 2024) have had a very positive impact.

We are able to drill the results further by equality characteristic, grade and length of service. The drill-down did not highlight any significant variances in engagement across equality characteristics, but did show lower engagement with policy officer level staff, band D; and management level, band E. When drilling the results by organisational grade. We are in the process of concluding another survey with these levels of staff, which will lead to an action plan to support enhanced engagement with bands D and E staff, which comprise approximately 60% of the organisation.

### **Peer Support Networks**

The Park Authority has developed a number of peer support networks.

We recognise the benefits for people of having others who share their own lived experience to bounce ideas with, discuss problems and share solutions. These support networks have typically developed via MS Teams channels, but several have moved to face to face discussion groups. There is a Menopause support group, a Carer’s support group; a support group for neurodiverse staff, and one for staff who are immune suppressed. These support groups are self-managed by staff, and are private groups. The organisation willingly gives staff time to support each other in this way.





### **Equalities partnerships**

Over the last 12 – 18 months, the Park Authority has signed up to several partnership agreements, to help us source expert advice from those with lived experience; to help us target our recruitment activity, and to help us be knowledgeable and active allies. We have partnership agreements with:

- a) Somewhere, which is an LGBTQ+ led social enterprise - Rainbow Enterprise Network (somewhereedi.org). A key part of their mission is to support and amplify LGBTQ+ and ally business owners through their innovative Rainbow Enterprise Network. Through this membership, we have a subscription to the quarterly Somewhere: For Us magazine, as well as a business mentoring scheme. We have access to support and guidance from local experts in the area of LGBTQ+. [Rainbow Enterprise Ntwk](#)
- b) Black Professionals UK (BPUK). Through this partnership, the Park Authority has access to the BPUK talent pool, access to various bespoke initiatives to help us attract and retain Black talent, and access to general consultancy around ethnicity, diversity and inclusion. We targeted recruitment for two internships through BPUK, on both occasions successfully appointing Black interns. We are also arranging careers events for young members of BPUK, bringing them up to the Park Authority offices to showcase career opportunities, and career paths to those roles.
- c) We have achieved LGBTQ+ Charter accreditation at foundations level with LGBT Youth. More information can be accessed in Chapter 3 – Our staff.
- d) We are also a Young Person's Guarantee organisation. The Young Person's Guarantee brings together employers, partners and young people. It aims to connect every 16-24 year old in Scotland to an opportunity. This could be a job, apprenticeship, further or higher education, training or volunteering.
- e) We are a Disability Confident Employer. This is a government-backed initiative to help employers recruit and retain disabled people. We have also supported an internship through Inclusion Scotland.
- f) We have signed up to the Menopause Pledge [Sign the Menopause Workplace Pledge](#).



## **Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) Equality Forum**

We have been participating in this forum since 2009. This specialist group, which meets regularly, enables the transfer of best practice and knowledge across the public sector. In addition, it has been engaged with a wide range of stakeholders and has provided information and support to member organisations across a variety of topics, including approaches to engagement / consultation of service users and employees, general and specific duties, challenges, and benefits of mainstreaming etc.

## **Section 2: Corporate functions and processes**

### **Equality impact assessment**

Using equality impact assessments (EqIA's) remains our principal way of identifying any potential for impact or detriment to minority groups. EqIA's are undertaken on new projects and activities, and the EAP and internal equality group have sight of all EqIA's.

In collaboration with the Equality Advocacy Group, we recently overhauled and updated our EqIA template and guidance, which has made the process clearer and easier to undertake. The EqIA of the Park Authority's newly adopted Gender Diversity Policy was recognised by our partner organisation (LGBT Youth) as an exemplar and has been posted on their website as an example of good practice.

### **Grant funding**

#### **Rangers**

The Park Authority provide grant funding to five out of the 14 ranger services operating across the National Park. Utilising the grant aid the Park Authority organise a variety of training for the rangers employed (this training also includes the ranger services not directly funded by the Park Authority).

This training includes sessions on how to engage with people including those with particular needs, vulnerable people and those that might be in distress. In addition to the generic training dedicated sessions designed to improve the level of engagement with certain groups are held including dementia friendly training with Alzheimers Scotland, NSPCC's "listen up, speak up" child protection training and all abilities access training with Able2Adventure - a local company specialising in making the outdoors accessible to all.



When combined with the grant award, the range of training and support provided gives partner ranger services the capacity and capability to become involved in wider initiatives such as the Volunteer Experience or Health Walks programmes.

### **Third party**

Funding is also granted to third parties for projects where the Park Authority is not necessarily the lead partner. Within the Park Authority's general grant terms and conditions to third parties, the following anti-discrimination conditions are included:

- The Recipient shall not unlawfully discriminate within the meaning and scope of any law, enactment, order, or regulation relating to discrimination (whether in race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, age or otherwise) in employment.
- The Recipient shall comply with the Equality Act 2010 and shall, at the request of the Funder, provide the Funder with information relating to equalities during the Grant Period, including but not limited to, equality impact assessments and service monitoring information.

Additional project specific grant conditions promoting equality are included for grants awarded to some third parties, eg grants awarded to Marr Area Partnership (MAP) and Voluntary Action Badenoch and Strathspey (VABS) require that 'consultation and engagement exercises will be delivered in line with the National Standards for Community Engagement', one of which is inclusion. This ensures that best practice is followed in identifying and involving communities across the National Park.

### **Cairngorms Trust**

The Cairngorms Trust Board consists of nine members with five males and four females on the Board (December 2024). We worked with a consultant in 2024 to develop a plan of action for the Trust Board to encourage representation from a more diverse range of trustees, this is on-going work. As part of our Board of Trustees, we have a nominated representative who is our equalities champion.

The Cairngorms Trust has been developing their equalities work through direction from their Board of Trustees who form their Local Action Group (LAG). The work that they do is primarily through their grant funding to community groups. However, there are a number of projects that they have been developing which are highlighted below:

- a) **Cairngorms Youth Fund**



This fund was developed following the Youth Manifesto that the CYAT presented at Europarc 2018 which was held in the Cairngorms. Following this the Cairngorms Trust worked in partnership with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the CYAT to form a Youth Local Action Group (YLAG) as a subgroup of the Cairngorms Trust, which was felt that it would be the most useful and potentially the easiest way of getting funds directly to young people and projects that targeted young people. The YLAG were tasked with developing criteria and a fund that was specifically aimed at young people under the age of 30. The funding for both the project and the Youth Fund was initially a direct commissioned project by the Cairngorms Trust through the Community Led Vision (CLV) Fund and has over the five rounds received funding through CLV, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Cairngorms Trust to run.

The work between the YLAG and the CYAT has been nationally recognised as good practice through Scottish Parliament and the YLAG model has been replicated throughout many other areas in Scotland. There has been a co-operation project running alongside the YLAG which has been worked on with a number of other developing Youth LAGs from across Scotland. Cairngorms YLAG has been a main instigator within this part of the project.

**b) Active Cairngorms E-bike (ACE) Project**

The ACE project was initially set up by the Cairngorms Trust in 2020 as part of a commissioned project from LEADER. In 2022 the initial facilitators of the project finished, and the Cairngorms Trust decided to carry the project on. Following this the project now runs from a local bike shop in Aviemore and services the whole of the Badenoch and Strathspey area.

The key outcomes of the project are:

- to support social prescribing of electric bikes (E-bikes) in Badenoch and Strathspey;
- allowing those that have health conditions access to an E-bike as a beneficial way of getting exercise;
- allow those that are finding the cost of car transport prohibitive access to an E-bike to see if it would be a viable option for them to commute to their



work or for their everyday journeys (shopping, transporting children to school etc).

- encourage residents to increase their leisure time spent on a bike and make the switch from short car journeys to cycling, with the hoped outcome of cycling for leisure, everyday journeys, and commuting.

The project has been a success, and the outcomes of the project are showing that we are helping to create change in behaviour and encourage cycling.

**c) Cairngorms Green Recovery Fund**

This was a joint initiative with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and delivered funding over two rounds in 2020-21 and 2021-22. The fund supported recovery for communities and businesses within the Cairngorms following the Covid 19 pandemic. Owing to two projects not completing there were some unused funds, so the Cairngorms Trust ran a smaller third round to use all the funds that had originally been allocated. The final project completed in 2024.

**d) Cairngorms Path Maintenance and Nature Campaign Funds**

Our campaign funds started with two projects running simultaneously. One was nature based and one path maintenance. Both projects were successful in completion and following this we decided to concentrate our efforts on raising funds for path maintenance within communities. Our second project has just completed and we are now looking for a third project to work with.

**e) Nature Recovery and Networks for Nature Funds**

Following our successful nature campaign fund and some of the Green Recovery Fund projects we were awarded funding from the Cairngorms National Park Authority which was added to with some of our own funds. This was to develop a Nature Recovery Fund which we successfully delivered in 2022 and 2023. In 2024 we have delivered the Networks for Nature Fund, and we hope to deliver similar in 2025.

**f) Park for All**

We were awarded funding to develop a lived experience panel from Black and Ethnic communities. We contracted facilitators to develop this panel and the facilitators also delivered training to our Trustees. This funding has a shared outcome with the Cairngorms National Park Authority and the information that we develop with the group will work across both organisations. We are now into our second year of this project and the Cairngorms Trust has co-developed with



the lived experience panel a fund similar in style to the Youth Fund which we are opening for applications in January 2024.

We have been looking at our imagery on our website and on our social media channels and are actively seeking with support from the lived experience panel additional images that allow us to better showcase the diversity of communities and individuals that might apply to our funds. The process has been a very useful project for the Cairngorms Trust to undertake and if possible we will continue to work with the lived experience panel to further develop funding for marginalised communities such as Black and minority ethnic communities or people.

### **Community Led Vision (CLV) Fund**

The CLV is funded from the Scottish Government with the Cairngorms National Park Authority acting as Accountable Body. This is delivered under the direction of the Board of the Cairngorms LAG Trust SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation); and has run on a year-to-year basis from August 2022 through to March 2025. Cross-cutting themes used in assessing the merits of all project proposals for CLV grant funding ensures equality is embedded in project delivery. All projects must demonstrate consideration and delivery of equalities outcomes and are scored using the criteria of how well the project addresses the cross-cutting themes of inclusion, equality, and diversity.

Guidance for the fund includes the following statement:

“Equality is about removing barriers, and diversity is about supporting and reflecting different cultures in Scotland, enabling all voices to be heard. Inclusion is about creating opportunities for people to work in, engage with, participate in, and experience the Cairngorms National Park”

The CLV programme proactively targets a broad range of fund applicants and recipients. Monitoring and evaluation criteria advise if any groups are not being engaged, which in turn informs any commissioned activity to target these groups.

Examples of recently funded projects that put equality at the heart of delivery include:

- Able2Adventure to continue with core delivery of outdoor activities for disabled groups and the hire of adaptive cycles and off-road wheelchairs.
- IRL Education who work within the local high school with pupils at risk of not achieving a positive destination after school amongst whom are care-



experienced, come from refugee families, and have additional support needs, including autism spectrum disorder.

- Grantown Community Centre to install a lift to enable the centre to become fully accessible.
- Cairngorms PRIDE a new multi-locational, partner-networked Development and Engagement Programme and Pride festival for the Cairngorms.

### **Climate Adaptation Capital Fund**

The Park Authority has awarded £370,000 to 18 farmers, land managers, businesses and community groups to fund immediate and positive action to address the challenges of climate change in the National Park.

The 18 funded projects will receive between £2,500 and £46,700 including Installation of a solar powered pump for supply for water to steadings, installation of solar PV system to several buildings, wildfire prevention and management equipment, and direct drill collaborations.

The fund was opened to specifically address the concerns of these audiences that their priorities for the climate emergency were needing funding to create immediate impacts. The fund was designed to be as simple as possible to enable the funding to be directed quickly and accurately to beneficiaries.

A second round of the fund has just been opened for 2025

### **Procurement**

We approved a new procurement strategy in autumn 2024, setting a strong focus on equality, encouraging small medium enterprise (SMEs) and third sector organisations to participate in tendering opportunities by including appropriate lotting within tender documents, to ensure potential bidders within these sectors are able to take part and that we don't create unnecessary barriers to participation.

Additionally, through our procurement strategy, we are committed to Community Wealth Building (CWB), a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. Traditional public sector policy has focused on the redistribution of wealth after it is created, whereas community wealth building focuses on mechanisms to ensure that wealth



is shared as it's created. CWB activities are arranged over the five pillar areas of spending, land and property, finance, workforce and inclusive ownership.

This has been further implemented by prioritising equalities in all relevant tender processes by identifying specific criteria to help assess individual tender responses, for example:

- The tender process for a new Cairngorms National Park website had equalities and accessibility at their core, with 10% of the overall technical / quality score specifically covering this area and a further 25% being based on user-centric approach. Tender requirements included extensive user testing with under-represented communities, a final site that exceeds the international Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.2 Level AA, the development of a specific Gaelic language version of the site, and a review of all imagery to ensure it reflects as diverse a range of National Park stakeholders as possible.
- Under-represented audiences were included as a specific focus for our community-led climate fund tender in December 2024, with 15% of the overall technical / quality score being determined by suppliers' approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion. In line with the core principles of our Cairngorms 2030 programme, widening participation and community co-design were key themes of the tender document, and bidders were asked to specify measures they would put in place to recruit, support and empower audiences from under-represented communities.

## Corporate communications

### Branding and publications

- a) **Content** - The Communications Team is actively working to diversify the voices we are hearing from, with a particular focus on those who are traditionally further away from power and influence. Recent examples include stories about young people with links to our projects, for example junior rangers and recipients of funding from the Cairngorms Youth Local Action Group Fund. We are also working to expand the range of media outlets we approach with stories, to allow us to reach a broader range of different audiences. With our residents' magazine Cairn, we strive for a balance of stories from across the National Park. We hope the magazine will develop into an important space to amplify the voices of local residents from all backgrounds.





- b) **Imagery** - Work to expand our image library to make this more diverse and representative of the many people who live in and enjoy the Cairngorms National Park has continued, with various commissions focussing specifically on including underrepresented communities, including older people, wheelchair users and LGBTQ+ communities. Training and development within the team and broader organisation has positively shifted our use of these images too, ensuring that we are not tokenistic, and that our daily use of images is reflective of diverse communities and that this is not restricted to when we are talking about equalities focussed issues.

#### **Digital engagement**

- a) **Targeted ads (young people)** - Our approach to digital advertising and audience engagement has shifted too, and particularly with campaigns like our recent resident survey our ability to target content by demographic has helped us to ensure that we are reaching and engaging with audiences, in particular young people on these channels.
- b) **Social media** - Our approach to social media has shifted significantly in this time, with the adoption of accessibility guidelines that aim to make our content more accessible, inclusive and appealing to diverse audiences. Our approach with these guidelines seeks to use our influential position to encourage others working with and in the National Park to make their content more inclusive too, by proactively sharing more on subtitles and alternative text. Our community management approach has been shaped with equality in mind, not only rising to the important challenge of being visible as allies and advocates of equality, but also ensuring that we have robust mechanisms to deal with prejudice behaviour when it appears on our online channels. By adopting a good faith approach, we challenge homophobia, racism and bigotry with clear evidence, and stand by our convictions publicly.
- c) **Website** - Our new website in development has been designed with accessibility at the core. We are seeking wherever possible to go above and beyond basic Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) accessibility standards, and are working to find creative and innovative ways of delivering content that do not lock people out of our communications. This includes summaries of pdf



documents, a combination of visual / audio / written content delivery options, and disabled audiences are being prioritised in our user testing phases.

### **Meetings / campaigns**

- a) **Dementia friends** - Alzheimer Scotland is one of our many partners in the delivery of the Cairngorms 2030 programme, with its Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre proving a valuable service for many local people. To help deepen that partnership, we are in talks with Alzheimer Scotland about how we can be more "dementia friendly" as an organisation. The charity has offered to deliver "dementia friends" training to staff to improve our understanding of dementia and how we can help individuals and loved ones affected by the condition.
- b) **LGBTQ+ history month and Pride** - As an organisation in the last two years we've sought to increase our connection with the LGBTQ+ community and occupied a space of visible allyship. We've attended and supported local Pride events across social media, and in our residents' magazine and run a month long campaign in support of LGBTQ+ history month, platforming the voices of people from the community.
- c) **Ethnic minority communities** - We worked to develop relationships with organisations championing Black and Ethnic communities including Black Scottish Adventurers and Girl Dreamers. Our priority has always been to focus on the substance of the relationships, and to use our channels to amplify and share the work of organisations excelling in this space, supporting their quest for representation and equality in the outdoors.

## **Section 3: Service provision**

### **Planning service**

We take a proactive approach to improving our planning service, including benchmarking against other planning authorities. This year we will be piloting a new approach to service improvement through the National Planning Improvement Framework. As part of our approach to improving service delivery, we put in place measures to ensure the planning system is easy to use and equitable, for example:



- Our Planning Service Charter sets out our customer service standards. It includes commitments to be open and engaging and to writing all policy guidance and other correspondence in plain English.
- We encourage people who are in support of, or objecting to, planning applications to speak at committee meetings so their views are heard directly as part of making decisions. This practice is not common with other planning authorities.
- We have a Community Planning Representatives Network to bring together Community Councils and Associations to improve how they can feed into the planning process better and learn from each other.
- We have planning policies to guide development and land use in a way that addresses identified equalities issues. For example, our current Local Development Plan includes a significantly enhanced requirement for affordable housing in four communities. The affordable housing requirement in these four communities is 45%, compared with the national benchmark in the rest of Scotland of 25%.
- As part of the early preparation of our next Local Development Plan, we are currently preparing an Evidence Report. This is a new requirement involving the collation of baseline evidence that will inform the creation of the next plan. Work on this will be tied into the community action planning process. We recognise the need to engage specifically with young people (under 25), disability groups, and Gypsy / Traveller groups during preparation of the next Local Development Plan. We have prepared a Participation Statement to set out how we will engage those priority groups as well as to ensure consultation opportunities are accessible to as many people as possible.

## **Recreation and outdoor access**

As the designated Access Authority under the Land Reform Scotland Act (2003), the Park Authority manages and promotes responsible outdoor access in the Cairngorms National Park.

### **Statutory duties**

- a) **Promotion of the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC):** SOAC publications. All promotional material is in keeping with the corporate design style and font.



Tread Lightly leaflet about responsible behaviour is produced in 10 additional languages. Posters and signs (promoting responsible behaviour) use simple graphics depicting correct behaviour, with limited amount of text.

- b) **Core paths planning:** The planning for Core Paths Plan review has commenced which has included a review of the Plan objectives. The EAP have input into this.
- c) **Access obstructions:** All access issues reported to the Access Authority are considered with due regard to all potential user groups with the principle of barrier free being the preferred option. Any gates agreed with the landowner must confirm with relevant British Standards (BS).

### Path investment

- a) **Speyside Way:** Work to remove outdated “rambler” style gates that are barriers to anyone other than pedestrians commenced in 2025. The contract is initially the removal / replacement of 20 gates on the section at Mains of Dalvey to Cromdale, with the hope to extend to the Grantown-on-Spey to Nethy Bridge section in future years.

Following requests from the public, the Cairngorms National Park Authority realigned a short section of the Speyside Way path to remove a steep slope. The section realigned is the short, steep section located just outside Kinraig heading east toward Aviemore. This slope was identified as being a barrier to a wide range of users and to active travel.

The Park Authority has completed the upgrade of signs and way markers on the Speyside Way. The new signs are in keeping with the Design Guide and Directional Signage that was developed by the Park Authority to ensure path signage was more welcoming and accessible to a wider audience.

- b) **Charters Chest – Braemar to Keiloch:** The Charter Chest path, mostly located on Invercauld Estate, provides essential safe access for walkers, trail runners, cyclists and other wheeled users by taking them off the A93, where traffic is regularly seen travelling at very high speeds around blind bends. It also links Braemar with Invercauld Estate’s path network around Craig Leek. For walkers and the more adventurous cyclists these paths connect Keiloch with Mar Lodge on the north side of the Dee. During construction of the new path it was identified that there are significant engineering challenges to secure a suitably wide path along the path line that had originally been identified, specifically for



the middle section of around 300m. The design agreed was in keeping with best practice and all reasonable steps have been taken to remove steep gradient.

- c) **Old Logging Way:** We are developing a project with our Clerk of Works to redesign the awkward chicanes at the Inverdrue and campsite entrance / exits to the Old Logging Way. These are no longer fit for purpose and can be a barrier to people on mobility bikes etc. The Park Authority's EAP was consulted on this project.
- d) **Dulnain Riverside path:** A contract was set to upgrade and repair a section of the Dulnain Riverside path, and all reasonable steps were taken to ensure the path was accessible to the widest range of users.

### **Community path leaflets**

The Park Authority adopts a rolling review and updating of path leaflets to ensure all contain common grading approach (Paths for All Scottish standard). This grading allows users to make the choice of which path is for them and gives path users confidence to get out. The new Park Authority website will include this grading information for each walk and additionally other key routes have also been graded including the Old Logging Way and the Speyside Way sections. The updated leaflet design incorporates the Park Authority standards of font size / style.

### **Visitor infrastructure**

The Park Authority invest in improved visitor infrastructure such as paths, signage, parking and public toilets through direct investment and grant aid through the Visitor Infrastructure Improvement Programme. All investment in path projects takes account of the differing needs of the wide range of both existing and potential path users, notably those with disabilities or restricted mobility.

Most projects funded in recent years have been either a new build or an upgrade to poorer quality paths and in both cases these are specifically designed to improve access through focussing on areas such as path widening, improving surfacing, reducing gradients and removing barriers such as the more restrictive gates. Examples include delivering 3km of new path near Braemar, improvements to the Speyside Way at Kincaig and in Anagach Woods at Grantown-on-Spey that make more sections accessible to all abilities; upgrades to the Loch Brandy car park in the Angus Glens and the Beach car park at Loch Morlich both of which will have enhanced provision for disabled parking. Investment in public toilet facilities



via grant aid has included delivering not just "standard" accessible / disabled toilets as a minimum level of provision eg at Glenmore but also investment in an additional Changing Places toilet at Loch Garten.

All grant offers must demonstrate steps taken to address relevant equalities issues.

## Gathering evidence

### Community grants programme

The equalities data gathered is used to monitor programme delivery.

### Consultations

We have made a concerted effort to reach out to a range of under-represented audiences as part of recent Park Authority-led consultations. For example, out of the over 1,600 people who responded to our fire management byelaws consultation, 20% considered themselves to be on a low income, 7% of respondents described their sexual orientation as bi, bisexual, gay or lesbian, and 20% said they were currently living with a physical or mental health condition or illness.

Meanwhile, for our Gaelic Language Plan consultation, 7% of responses were received in Gaelic (up 244% on five years ago) and 3% of responses came from people identifying as trans. Our efforts here were aided by a unique collaboration with Gaelic influencer Somhairle Johnston, which resulted in over 200 responses from both young people and native Gaelic speakers. See <https://www.instagram.com/p/C4G5mnbNYdx/?next=%2F> for an example of some of this content.

### Events

We run a number of events annually and seek wherever possible to gather equalities data of attendees.

1. Information is gathered in a non-compulsory way, via the tablet, or encouraging attendees to use an online link, or face to face if they are comfortable.
2. We deliberately don't gather equalities evidence in a compulsory manner at events to prevent it being a barrier to attendance.
3. Adaptive approach: where appropriate or needed, some data is gathered where attendees are comfortable to help inform our practice or the outcomes of the work, for example, in gamification it has been used to ensure a variety of voices.



4. Compulsory attendee data is primarily just numbers of people engaged with.

### **Visitor and residents survey**

Every five years since the National Park was designated in 2003, the Park Authority has undertaken a survey to understand the demographics, motivations and behaviour of our visitors. The latest wave of that survey is running May 2024 – April 2025, with researchers conducting face-to-face surveys and an online version also promoted with the support of the Cairngorms Business Partnership (CBP). Alongside the visitor survey, for the first time we have also commissioned an online residents' survey to better understand those who live and work here. Both surveys will gather comprehensive demographic data for equalities purposes, including age, health conditions, socio-economic status, employment status, ethnicity, caring responsibilities, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity.

We aim to report on both the visitor and resident demographics at the mid-term reporting period in April 2027.

### **Leadership and staff awareness**

Mainstreaming the equality duty is an organisational responsibility and leadership, staff and Board awareness are central to success.

### **Equality training**

Over 2022 and 2023, the Park Authority contracted JRS Knowhow to deliver in-person equality training to all our staff and Board. The training focussed on understanding how our identities, beliefs and intentions interact with our work; the dominant identities and how they shape the world; how advantage is invisible to those who have it, impacts of dominance; understanding what the equality act means for our work; a rights-based approach; the public sector equality duty (PSED); inclusive working cultures; intention and impact; and understanding barriers and how to address them.

### **E-learning**

The above in person training is complemented by online training courses that the Park Authority subscribe to through the Learning Pool. All staff are required to complete the following equalities courses every two years:

- a) Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging
- b) Neurodiversity inclusion in practice
- c) Sexual harassment in the workplace



There are a number of additional courses available, including:

- a) Menopause wellbeing at work
- b) Active bystander in practice
- c) Allyship in practice
- d) Disability inclusion in practice

### **LGBTQ+ Charter**

The Park Authority signed up to the LGBTQ+ Charter accreditation process in May 2022, and achieved accreditation at Foundation level in May 2024.

The Charter journey involved the development of an action plan to address identified gaps with regards engagement and support. This action plan was consulted with all staff via the SCF. Key actions that were agreed and have been fulfilled towards achieving the Foundation level accreditation include:

- a) Staff have been given the opportunity (if they wish) to wear their staff ID badges on a rainbow lanyard, which shows visibility and allyship.
- b) Staff have been invited to display their pronouns on their e-mail signatures, ID badges and business cards, if they wish.
- c) Recruitment adverts are placed on relevant job boards representing equality groups, and recruitment advertising is explicit about welcoming applications from specific, underrepresented, groups.
- d) We have contracted organisational support, guidance and membership from a local expert in the area of LGBTQ+ - Rainbow Enterprise Network [Rainbow Enterprise Network](#) (REN).
- e) We have developed a Gender Diversity Policy to support transgender and non-binary staff. The LGBTQ+ Charter applauded both this policy and the associated EQiA as exemplars of good practice, and these documents are available on their website.
- f) We had an engagement stand at Highland Pride in Inverness, showcasing the work of the Park Authority generally, and seeking views about opportunities and barriers for LGBTQ+ people engaging with the Park Authority.
- g) We supported the REN with its consultation on the potential of running a Park Pride event.





- h) LGBTQ+ briefing information is provided in the staff induction pack. Alongside this, we also provide the legal guidance on the rights of those who hold gender critical beliefs.
- i) We have developed LGBTQ+ specific content for our social media and website channels such as history month campaigns.
- j) We have amended our “Working for the Park Authority” landing page on the Park Authority website, providing links to our equalities policies, partnerships and equalities kite marks.

Since launching the LGBTQ+ Charter, we have had a great deal of positive feedback from staff about how much the organisation has improved with regards to equalities, and is now seen as being a more diverse and inclusive organisation than it was two or three years ago. Comments have included the following:

"I started working with the Park Authority three years ago, and not long after I started in my role I was offered some self-directed training as part of the Park Authority signing up to the LGBTQ+ Charter. I enjoyed the training, and it gave me the confidence to be open about my sexual orientation with my colleagues. I've never felt comfortable sharing this openly in a workplace before, and it felt amazing to be able to be truly myself."

"It has been fantastic to see LGBTQ+ content on social media channels. It seems to have gone down extremely well locally and has been spotted by a Junior Ranger who found it really inclusive for them."

"By actively celebrating LGBTQ+ History Month and explaining its steps towards the LGBTQ+ Charter, the Park Authority sends out a message that it is committed to being a Park for All, not just by saying it to us, but in the hard work it's done to really get under the skin of the LGBTQ+ community in the National Park and lift up their voices. I genuinely believe that this activity will have made a difference to people. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community I feel really optimistic, and have come away from this with a list of great activities to join and businesses to support in the future as well. It would be great if we can continue this celebration beyond LGBTQ+ History Month and continue to highlight voices of all genders, backgrounds and cultures in the National Park."

"I would not have wanted to work for the Park Authority three years ago. But the Park Authority is now so much more inclusive and diverse, that I felt now that I did want to work for the Park Authority and so I applied for the role."



Our analysis of staff equality data is that since we embarked on the LGBTQ+ Charter accreditation journey, we have more LGBTQ+ staff working for us now than before we embarked on the Charter. We consider that all the work our Charter journey has facilitated, including the increased visibility, enhancement of policies and allyship, has had a positive impact on staff. Since we started the journey and amended our website to provide links to all our equalities policies, we have seen an increase in the numbers of LGBTQ+ job applicants.

### **New policies**

Over the last 18 months, in consultation with the Equality Advocacy Group, the Equality Advisory panel, senior management and staff via the SCF, we have developed several new, inclusive staff policies:

1. **Neurodiversity Policy.** This policy covers the supportive approach of the Park Authority towards staff, and potential staff, who are neurodivergent, or who believe they may be neurodivergent. It sets out a commitment to eliminate barriers (including prejudice) that neurodivergent people face in the workplace.  
[NeurodiversityPolicy2023V1.0.pdf](#)
2. **Reasonable Adjustments Passport Policy:** This policy covers the approach of the Park Authority with regards to developing and managing reasonable adjustments records for staff who have a disability or believe they may have a disability or become disabled. The reasonable adjustments passport is a written document designed to provide a record of an individual's support needs, which will help them to function to their full potential and deliver the role they were appointed to, in a supportive and encouraging environment.  
[ReasonableAdjustmentsPassportPolicy-V1.0.pdf](#)
3. **Gender Diversity Policy:** This policy sets out the Park Authority's commitment and approach to ensuring that transgender employees are treated with dignity and respect and are not disadvantaged in the workplace.  
[GenderDiversityPolicy.pdf](#)
4. **Supporting Staff through Pregnancy Loss Policy:** This document sets out the rights of employees affected by a miscarriage, stillbirth or termination and explains the emotional and practical support that we can provide. This includes rights and support for the person experiencing the pregnancy loss, as well as the partner and parents of the baby who has passed away.



[MiscarriagePolicy-V1.0docx.docx](#)

5. **Fertility Treatment Policy:** This policy sets out the time off that we grant to employees who are undergoing fertility treatment and explains the support available to them. [Fertility Treatment Policy](#)
6. **Menstrual Health and Endometriosis Support Policy:** This policy sets out the rights of staff affected by menstrual symptoms and / or endometriosis and explains the support available to them. [Menstrual Health Policy](#)

## Recruitment

Our recruitment and selection procedure is designed to be fair, robust and follow best practice. Applicants are assessed on competencies that are needed to carry out the role effectively. Recruitment panels comprise of three or more individuals to maximise fairness and transparency. Recruitment panels typically comprise a gender mix, and this is explicit in our recruitment policy.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority is a disability confident employer, and we guarantee to interview applicants with a disability who meet the essential criteria of the post.

The Cairngorms National Park Authority has a policy that all vacant posts are advertised internally in the first instance. An internal candidate is guaranteed an interview if they meet the essential criteria of the post. There is no guarantee of appointment though, and if the post is not appointed internally, it will be advertised externally.

Over the last few years, we have tried to make our recruitment more inclusive by:

- Removing requirement for degree qualification and removing requirement for a driving licence from the person specification of most new job descriptions unless deemed absolutely necessary to deliver the role.
- starting recruitment adverts with the following: "Cairngorms National Park Authority is an inclusive organisation and we welcome applications from everyone irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, relationship status, disability, age and social class. We particularly welcome applications from individuals from Black, Asian and Ethnic communities, disabled and LGBTQ+ communities, as they are under-represented in the environment sector".



### Equal opportunities monitoring in recruitment

Full recruitment data can be found in Appendix 2.

All applicants are asked to complete an equality monitoring data form, that closely resembles the staff form. Until 2022 this was completed manually, but in 2023 we started to use applicant tracking site, WebRecruit so the data is now gathered via this platform.

The key recruitment metrics over the reporting period are set out below

#### External applications

		2022	2023
<b>Applicants</b>		244	297
<b>Sex</b>	Female	138	148
	Male	100	146
	Prefer not to say	6	6
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	LGBTQ+	21 (9%)	35 (12%)
	Prefer not to say	25 (10%)	36 (12%)
<b>Disabled</b>	Yes	41 (16%)	18 (6%)
	Prefer not to say	6 (2%)	9 (3%)
<b>Black, Asian and Ethnic groups</b>	Yes	10(4%)	19 (6%)
	Prefer not to say	5 (2%)	7 (2%)

#### Analysis

- LGBTQ+ applicants has increased (9% to12%)
- “Prefer not to say” in LGBTQ+ section increased from 10% in 2022 to 12% in 2023
- Decrease in number of applicants with a disability (from 16% to 6%)
- Marginal increase in number of Black, Asian and Ethnic applicants

#### Appointments (external and internal combined)

		2022	2023
<b>Appointments</b>		31	30
<b>Sex</b>	Female	18	15
	Male	12	15
	Prefer not to say	1	



<b>Sexual orientation</b>	LGBTQ+	5	4
	Prefer not to say		1
<b>Disabled</b>	No	26	28
	Yes	2	2
	Prefer not to say	3	
<b>Black, Asian and Ethnic groups</b>		0	0
	Prefer not to say		

So, over the last two years, the gender balance of appointments has been fairly equal. The number of LGBTQ+ appointments has remained static, but disappointingly, no ethnic minorities were appointed in the reporting period. In 2024, we targeted recruitment of two internships through Black Professionals UK (BPUK), both resulted in successful appointments but were out with the above reporting period.

### **Conclusion**

We hope this section demonstrates the extent to which we have mainstreamed the equality duty into all aspects of our work, fostering good relations between groups, eliminating discrimination, and ensuring equality of opportunity. Staff, stakeholder and community engagement projects, initiatives and events have sought to attract increased participation from diverse groups.

Mechanisms to improve inclusion have been further engrained into the Park Authority's corporate functions and processes, and we have worked towards weaving equality, diversity and inclusion values into our organisational function and statutory framework.



## Chapter 3 - Our staff

Our staff are at the heart of the Cairngorms National Park Authority. We ensure this by reviewing our internal recruitment procedures and development opportunities, updating staff policies, senior management awareness and evaluating equality monitoring data for our staff and Board. These actions will help enshrine equality, diversity, and inclusion, along with our values, into our daily work.

This section provides an analysis of staff and Board equality data, and also provides data for occupational segregation.

### Employee data

The full set of staff and Board equalities monitoring data is set out in Appendix 2.

As an employer, staff numbers have grown in the last few years. Data from September in each year shows that numbers have increased from 98 in 2021, to 104 in 2022, 118 in 2023 and 128 in 2024. The equality monitoring survey has evolved during this time, from being a survey conducted on SurveyMonkey in 2021, to one that from 2022 staff can manage themselves in our human resources database, PeopleHR. We have also expanded some of the potential responses.

The survey is conducted each year in February / March, and response rates have varied from 74% in 2021, to 69% in 2022, 78% in 2023, and were particularly good in 2024 at 89%. We think they dipped in 2022 as the new database was getting up and running.

### Key metrics are set out below

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
<b>Responses</b>	52 out of 75 (69% response rate)	57 out of 77 (74%)	73 out of 106(69%)	90 out of 116 (78%)	95 out of 107 (89%)
<b>LGBTQ+</b>		3 (6%)	3 (5%)	3 (4%)	7 (8%)
	Don't share at work	0	(2%)	2 (3%)	2 (2%)
	Prefer not to say	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	35 (48%)	24 (27%)
<b>Disabled</b>	3 (6%)	3 (5%)	15 (20%)	16 (18%)	18 (18%)



	Don't share at work	Not asked	Not asked	0	5 (6%)	3 (3%)
	Prefer not to say	0	0	3 (4%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)
<b>Black, Asian and Ethnic groups</b>		0	0	0	0	0
	Prefer not to say	0	1 (2%)	0	0	0

### Analysis

Staff numbers have increased by 42% from 2020 to 2024 but this increase in numbers may show little increase in percentages.

- Number of LGBTQ+ staff has doubled, but the percentage increase is marginal (6% to 7%). Nevertheless, this is still encouraging, and we believe that the LGBTQ+ Charter accreditation process has enhanced the sense of welcome and inclusion to all minorities.
- Number of “prefer not to say” in the LGBTQ+ section notably increased from 2% in 2020 to 16% in 2024. This coupled with the fact that there are still LGBTQ+ staff who do not wish to be open about their sexuality in the workplace, suggests we cannot be complacent with regards to our work around LGBTQ+ inclusion, and engagement will continue in this regard.
- There is a big increase in the number of staff with a disability from 6% up to 18%, which could be due to the adoption of the Neurodiversity Policy and Reasonable Adjustments Passport Policy. The Park Authority has become very open about neurodiversity, seeing it as a strength and a quality to be welcomed in the workplace, such that staff who may previously have preferred not to disclose this as a disability are now comfortable about being open about their neurodiversity.
- At the point of gathering this data (February / March 2024), there was no change in number of Black, Asian and Ethnic staff. We have subsequently targeted recruitment for two internships through the BPUK network and both posts were successfully appointed.

### Flexible working

Flexible working has been in place at the Park Authority since its inception in 2003, and enables staff to choose their work pattern, eg reducing working hours or compressed hours. There were very few flexible working requests prior to the Covid 19 pandemic, but since



then, in 2022 we adopted a hybrid working policy whereby the default position is that staff can work 50:50 home / office and can also work their hours to suit their personal circumstances. Given the flexible working environment, there have been very few flexible working requests to work more than 50% from home location, with approximately 20% of staff working less than 50% of their contracted hours in the office. We have however noted a small increase in the number of staff requesting annualised hours whereby they only work during the school term, which has been supported organisationally.

### **Maternity leave (numbers)**

In the last two years, three female members of staff have been on maternity leave. The Park Authority operates an enhanced maternity pay, with staff receiving full pay for the first six months of maternity leave, and statutory maternity pay for the next 13 weeks.

### **Paternity leave (numbers)**

In the last two years, three people have been on paternity leave. The Park Authority pays three weeks full pay.

### **Shared parental leave (numbers)**

There have been no applicants for shared parental leave. In terms of this policy, male staff are entitled to the same enhancements as female staff who take maternity leave

### **Staff development statistics**

Every attempt is made to retain the training budget at healthy levels comparative to the economic circumstances. Within this budget the Park Authority has a policy of ensuring any training need identified through the appraisal process will be prioritised, and typically staff attend an average of up to four training events each year. Identification of training needs is based on individual work targets set for each year; competency levels to be attained by employees: and employee career aspirations.

#### **Staff Development 2023**

In 2023, 59 women and 34 men went on at least one training course, which represents 89% of the total number of staff employed in the year.

#### **Staff Development 2024**

In 2024, 33 women and 23 men went on at least one training course., which represents 47% of the total number of staff employed in the year. Training in 2024 was paused due to the





Scottish Government spending freeze that was imposed in October 2024. These statistics clearly show the impact of this freeze. The only training that has been contracted in this time has been mandatory health and safety or continuous professional development (CPD) courses.

Analysis of staff training data can be found in Appendix 2.

### **Gender pay gap – see Appendix 3 for full report**

We are committed to promoting and embedding equality of opportunity and diversity in employment. We believe this extends to the way we reward our staff, and that reward should be awarded fairly and equitably. We are committed to the principle of equal pay for all our employees and aim to eliminate any bias in our reward system.

Cairngorms National Park Authority jobs are evaluated to determine which salary band they should be placed in, with most staff starting at the bottom of the band and progressing to the top of the band by annual pay awards. The potential for all forms of inequality is thus reduced by the fact that jobs are objectively evaluated, and salaries allocated according to the job content rather than the person. In designing the job evaluation framework in use within the Park Authority, we recognised the risk of inequality within evaluation systems, such as the weighting given to particular types of work, for example caring tasks have often attracted a lower weighting than manual labour in the past, which indirectly favours more men than women, and ensured these elements were fully designed out of our framework. The Park Authority evaluation system has been designed and equality impact assessed to avoid this type of discrimination.

An equal pay audit is conducted annually, the most recent being calculated on the basis of a snapshot of staff data as at 31 March 2024. The full report can be seen in Appendix 3.

In summary, this equal pay audit flags female staff make up 57% of the workforce. The overall average male hourly salary is £23.28 and the overall average female salary is £20.22 (the average hourly salary across the organisation is £21.53), making the mean gender pay gap 13.14%. This figure is higher than the Park Authority's 2023 gender pay gap of 9.55%, as well as the 2022 figure of 12.49%, but represents an improvement on the figures in 2021 of 17.44%, 2020 of 17.92%, 2019 of 19.25%, 2018 of 20.20%, 2017 of 21.47%, and 2015 of 23.64%. This figure includes the CEO's pay, which if removed, the mean gender pay gap would be 10.93%.



If we use the median methodology to calculate the gender pay gap, the figure is 4.55%. Statistics from the Office of National Statistics Survey of Hours and Earnings 2023 (November 2023) provides data on the median pay gap in Scotland, which is of 8.7%. Therefore, the Park Authority's median pay gap is lower than the Scottish median pay gap, and also lower than the UK figure of 14.3%.

The statistics suggest an increase in the mean gender pay gap generally. But the analysis of the data presented in the table below actually highlights that the gender pay gap is negative across three grades – ie female hourly rate is higher than the male hourly rate. There is a marginal gender pay gap at bands C1, E and F, where the male hourly rate is slightly higher than the female rate, with an increasing gender pay gap at band A. However, at band G pay, representing the highest paid staff there are no female staff at this grade. As such, given there are no comparators to draw on there is no statistical gender pay gap at this grade, but when the grade is included in the total organisational gender pay gap it has the effect of distorting the overall gender pay gap, and actually masks the fact that across all other pay bands, the organisation is doing pretty well.

2023 / 24	
Grade	Pay gap
A	15.99%
B	0%
B1	-0.30%
C	-4.05
C1	2.55%
D	-2.55%
E	1.29%
F	3.48%

### Occupational segregation

We recognise that the analysis of employment data helps us better understand the intersections between the employment journey and protected characteristics. As our staff numbers are relatively small, we have not disaggregated beyond the job grade. Please see Appendix 4 that shows occupational segregation by gender, disability and race.



## Board equality data

Board members are asked to complete the same equality monitoring survey questions as staff, but this is done anonymously via SurveyMonkey. This data informs Board diversity and succession planning.

Board completion of this survey is showing a declining trajectory, with just a 53% response rate in 2023 and 61% in 2024. This is disappointing and an area of attention for our new suite of equality outcomes, Outcome 1.

	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Responses</b>	17 out of 19 (89%)	18 out of 19 (95%)	16 out of 19 (84%)	10 out of 19 (53%)	11 out of 19 (61%)

The response rate has declined significantly since the benchmark date in 2020, down from 89% to 61% response rate in 2024. Full survey results can be found in Appendix 2.



## Chapter 4 – Equality outcomes

Section 1: Update on previous outcomes (detailed update table can be found in Appendix 5)

### Outcome 1

**Our workforce will become more diverse. We will have more women in senior positions in the organisation and an increased number of minority staff working for us (specifically with relation to sexual orientation, disability and ethnicity).**

There are currently 12 women in the senior management grades (bands E, F and G), two more than in 2022. In 2021, there were only seven women at this level of the organisation. There are three women at head of service level in comparison to one in 2021. This represents 25% of staff at this level in comparison to 14% in 2021. The Park Authority has a larger LGBTQ+ population than previously, and we have more staff identifying as having a disability than we did in 2021. However, we have very few staff who represent an ethnic minority and there is work to be done in this regard.

Key actions that have helped us achieve a more diverse workforce include:

- a) Inclusion of degree qualification and requirement for a driving licence has been removed from the person specification of most new job descriptions unless deemed absolutely necessary to deliver the role.
- b) All recruitment adverts start with “Cairngorms National Park Authority is an inclusive organisation and we welcome applications from everyone irrespective of sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, relationship status, disability, age and social class. We particularly welcome applications from individuals from Black, Asian and Ethnic communities, disabled and LGBTQ+ communities, as they are under-represented in the environment sector”.
- c) We signed up to the LGBTQ+ Charter in 2022 and in May 2024 achieved accreditation at Foundation level. A number of the actions that supported this accreditation have visibly shown that we are an organisation that welcomes diversity.



- d) We have adopted several inclusive policies around wellbeing and equality, including those supporting gender diversity, neurodiversity, fertility treatment; pregnancy loss, menstrual health. Staff surveys have reported a notable appreciation of our approach to equality and diversity.
- e) We have changed the “Working for the Park Authority” landing page of our website, by providing links to all the EDI policies, by promoting the equalities partnerships, and by setting out all the facilities we can offer eg gender neutral toilets.
- f) The evolution of both the external EAP and the internal Equality Advocacy Group, as well as the equalities partnerships we have signed up to have enhanced advice and engagement on equality matters.
- g) We installed a human resources database that allows staff to complete their equalities monitoring data electronically. Previously this data was gathered via SurveyMonkey. This, together with our new recruitment applicant tracking system has increased disclosure.
- h) We delivered a programme of equalities training to staff and Board, which included day-long face to face sessions attended by 88% of all staff, a virtual line managers disability session, a virtual senior managers leadership session, and a day-long face to face session for Board members attended by 94% members.

Some actions have not yet been delivered, and although there have been improvements in engagement and statistics have shown an increase in diversity across some protected characteristics, others have not improved, particularly around ethnic minorities. We feel organisationally that there is still work to be done, and that the diversity could be better. We recognise that in some areas we are more diverse in our organisation than the census data shows for the nation (e.g. 7% of our staff are LGBTQ+, which compares to census data of just 4% LGBTQ+ people in Scotland); but we have always aspired to be an organisation that delivers above the legal floor, and that doesn't settle for meeting the minimum standard. As a result, we have tailored an outcome for the next 4-years that continues the focus on increasing the diversity of the workforce.

## **Outcome 2**

**Promoting and celebrating a national park for all visitors.**



With regards socio economic status, initial data from the 2024/25 Visitor Survey summer report shows a decline in the numbers from C2, D and E social groups (C2 is skilled manual occupations, D and E are semi-skilled and unskilled manual occupations, unemployed and lowest grade occupations). AB describes higher and intermediate managerial, administrative, professional qualifications, and C1 is supervisory, clerical and junior managerial, administrative professional occupations. There has been a marginal increase in ABC1 numbers.

	<b>2024</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>ABC1</b>	79%	75%
<b>C2DE</b>	17%	22%

We think that rather than showing a decline in C2,D and E specific to the Cairngorms this is likely to reflect reduced levels of travel due to cost of living factors that disproportionately affect lower income groups. This has been observed nationally eg as indicated in the Scottish Tourism Index Outcome 4.

With regards to Black and Ethnic groups, the 2024 / 25 Visitor Survey summer report shows no change from 2019.

	<b>2024</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>White</b>	97%	97%
<b>Black and Ethnic communities or people</b>	3%	3%

However, the Scottish People and Nature Survey (SPANS) undertaken by NatureScot included an additional question in 2024 allowing Cairngorms specific responses to be measured which showed:

- White 89%
- Black and Ethnic communities or people 11%

When compared with the national sample of 93% white and 5% Black and Ethnic communities or people this shows higher than average Black and Ethnic communities or people visits to the Cairngorms.

In terms of disability, SPANS 2023/24 showed 30% of people surveyed reporting they have a health condition. This is above the target of 13%.



Visitor Survey figures show an increase in the proportion of young people visiting the National Park at 22% in 2024 compared to 19% in 2019. However, the proportion of older visitors declined from 20% in 2019 to 18% in 2024. These figures were nevertheless on target.

The Park Authority volunteer rangers helped support activities for those with a disability at a further Able2Adventure activity day in 2024. The Park Authority has and continues to invest in bringing more paths up to all abilities standard as well as opening 2 km of new accessible path at Braemar in 2024.

### **Outcome 3**

#### **Ensuring and enhancing more inclusive access to nature.**

Over the last two years, we have gathered significant amounts of data at nature-based events. Various projects have also successfully recruited and supported people to access nature. The Cairngorms Nature Festival that we hosted in 2023 was successful in meeting the needs of inclusion groups – 50% of the events were free of charge, and almost all were low cost; 31 events were listed as having wheelchair access and there were six events specifically for people with disabilities. In the last two years the outdoor learning travel grant has supported young people from 54 primary schools and 22 secondary schools to access nature. Our partnership with Alzheimer Scotland's Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre has welcomed 700 attendees, including 509 people living with dementia and 191 carers, all of whom have taken part in over 150 nature-based activities at the Badaguish Centre.

Key activities included:

- a) The Cairngorms Capercaillie Project worked with Project Scotland to recruit and support young people between 16 and 30 to access nature-based experiences to help them achieve their goals and get on in life.
- b) Projects including Cairngorms Rare Plants and Wild Connections, the Cairngorms Capercaillie Project, and Rare Invertebrates in the Cairngorms, have all been recruiting and supporting people to access nature, including people from target inclusion groups.
- c) Through ongoing partnerships, including with Able2Adventure, Nature4Health, and Badaguish and Alzheimer Scotland, the Cairngorms Nature Festival offered



new tailored activities for a range of inclusion groups, for example, working in partnership with Nature4Health the festival included a hike up Meall ‘a Bhuachaille and lunch at Ryvoan Bothy for 31 refugees.

The Cairngorms Nature Festival was a key mechanism to support delivery of this outcome. Unfortunately, budgetary constraints meant that we could not deliver the festival in 2024, and there are no plans to deliver it in the same format in future years. However, we remain committed to enhancing more inclusive access to nature, and will continue this focus through the new Outcome 2 (2025 – 2029) “We will target our infrastructure investment and manage (or organise / arrange) develop our activities so as to continue reducing barriers to access and facilitating inclusive and affordable access to the nature of the National Park, and to the opportunities offered in the National Park”.

#### **Outcome 4**

##### **More equality groups participate in Cairngorms National Park Authority led consultations and stakeholder forums / groups to influence decisions made in relation to the management of the Cairngorms National Park.**

Park Authority-led consultations have continued to prioritise under-represented communities as key audiences and we have developed and strengthened relationships with a number of key partners, including Black Scottish Adventurers, LGBT Youth Scotland, Cairngorms Pride Paddlers, and Able2Adventure. For our Cairngorms 2030 programme consultation, 4.4% of respondents identified as LGBTQ+, 1.7% as being from an ethnic minority background, 21.8% of people living with a physical mental health condition and 19.3% were on a low income.

Out of the over 1,600 people who responded to our fire management byelaws consultation in 2024, 20% considered themselves to be on a low income, 7% of respondents described their sexual orientation as bi, bisexual, gay or lesbian and 20% said they were currently living with a physical or mental health condition or illness. Meanwhile, for our Gaelic Language Plan consultation 7% of responses were received in Gaelic (up 244% on five years ago) and 3% of responses came from people identifying as trans.

Actions we have delivered include:

- Captioning, British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation and Gaelic translation continue to be offered for all Board and planning meetings. We have also





explored provision for community roadshow events and are using the Cairngorms 2030 engagement programme and its commitment to widening participation, to explore a range of options in this area.

- Findings from the 2021 audit of our website fed in directly to the tender documentation for our new website, the contract of which was awarded in 2024. Accessibility and equalities formed 10% of the overall mark, with a further 25% allocated to a user-centric approach (including a minimum standard of WCAG 2.2 AA). Built into the website build itself is real-world user testing, both at a design stage and as a final quality assurance aspect of the build, which is due to take place in the early months of 2025.
- Park Authority communication materials are reviewed annually, and on an ongoing basis, to ensure they incorporate appropriate imagery reflective of the diverse range of audiences engaging with the Cairngorms National Park. We continue to prioritise inclusive imagery in the majority of photo / video commissions and now have hundreds of new images to choose from. Crucial to our approach is using diverse imagery to accompany all aspects of our work and not limiting this to equalities-specific content. For example, our 20th anniversary film features Gaelic translation, and several lines of Gaelic, plus a wide range of audiences with a deep connection to the Cairngorms going about their daily lives.

### **Cairngorms 2030 contribution to the delivery of the Outcomes**

There are 20 long-term projects working towards transformational change in the Cairngorms, benefiting people's health and wellbeing, delivering on climate change and enhancing nature across the National Park. The programme is an unprecedented partnership of over 70 organisations and is supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, with thanks to players of the National Lottery.

A commitment to widening participation and engaging with underrepresented communities is a core principle and delivery outcome of Cairngorms 2030. After the first year of the delivery phase (2024) some of the highlights of work across the programme related to the relevant priority equalities outcomes are summarised below.

Outcome 1:



- At the end of 2024, there were new roles totalling 21.4 FTE directly connected to Cairngorms 2030. Reporting on equalities monitoring for this subset of employees would not be appropriate, but this contribution to the growing organisation should be considered in relation to the broader reporting on Outcome 1.

#### Outcome 3:

- The public health and the outdoors project works in partnership with NHS Highland to deliver nature prescriptions in Badenoch and Strathspey. The project's two Green Health Link Workers support individuals with a range of needs and motivations to spend time with nature and access the associated health and wellbeing benefits. In 2024, the project received 29 referrals and is currently working with 19 participants, largely on a 1:1 basis.
- Alzheimer's Scotland's Outdoor Dementia Resource Centre (ODRC) is a Cairngorms 2030 project which is actively supporting people with dementia and their carers to spend more time in nature. During 2024, the ODRC team have run over 100 sessions from their centre at Badaguish and at outreach events across the National Park. This includes collaborating with other local organisation such as Able2Adventure to offer regular accessible cycling and other activities.
- The climate learning and education project has worked with five high schools in the National Park to incorporate time in nature into curricular activities for young people. Amongst other activities, this has included:
  - Biodiversity monitoring with 60 S2 / S3 students.
  - Regular community gardening sessions for young people with additional support needs.
  - Place-based learning for high school students focussing on ecology, land management and special landscape qualities (SLQ's) at a local sporting estate.
- The Cycle Friendly Cairngorms project is working with local social enterprise, the SPIN Project to support:
  - Affordable access to refurbished bicycles and the access and health benefits associated with active travel around the National Park.
  - Pay-what-you-can bike maintenance classes and Dr Bike in communities and schools.



Outcome 4:

- As part of Cairngorms 2030, work has been commissioned to further develop a lived experience panel to inform, guide and enhance development of projects. The aim of this is to support people from historically under-represented communities – in particular, Black and Ethnic communities – to access the benefits of the National Park and the Cairngorms 2030 programme in a way which is just, equitable and sustainable.
- Two projects are already piloting innovative engagement methods, which involve building relationships with local equality groups and under-represented communities. These approaches contribute to engagement on the Local Development Plan and the characterisation of the SLQ's of the Cairngorms.

Section 2: Equality outcomes 2025 – 2029 (summary of outcome and evidence, with full outcome action plan set out in Appendix 6)

### **Equality outcome 1**

Led by Kate Christie, Head of Organisational Development

**We will have an increasingly diverse workforce with more under-represented groups working for us, supported by an inclusive culture, where all existing, new and prospective staff are treated equitably, and feel that they belong.**

#### **Evidence**

Our staff and recruitment equality monitoring surveys have indicated that there has been some improvement in our approach to equalities over the last four years. In addition, a year long programme of activity across the organisation and Board has resulted in the development and adoption of a new set of principles (Passion and Dedication; Community; Pioneering and Inspiring Leadership), supporting a cultural drive toward equalities and an organisational "Community" of openness, support, respect and inclusivity. This significant outcome delivers a firm foundation to take forward improvement actions toward a more diverse workforce over the coming period.

However, the lack of diversity in our senior roles has been noted by staff and the statistics still show that although there are improvements in the employee demographic over the last four years, more could be done to encourage greater diversity across the organisation. For example:



1. The Staff and Board Equality Monitoring Data for the last two years (2023 and 2024 - Appendix 2) demonstrates low numbers of minority representation, but also large numbers who “prefer not to say”:
2. Although the numbers of LGBTQ+ staff working at the Park Authority (average 7% in both years) is higher than the 2022 census data records for Scotland (4%), we note that a large number identified “prefer not to say” (27% in 2023 and 16% in 2024), and some who are not comfortable about being open about their sexuality in the workplace.
3. Although there has been an increase in the numbers of staff with a disability (approximately 18% in both years), the 2022 census data records people reporting a long-term illness, disease or condition as 21.4%, so the Park Authority is behind census data in this regard. In addition, there has been a marginal increase in the number of staff who are not totally open about their disability in the workplace.
4. We have very low / no indication of ethnic minorities.
5. The completion rate of the equalities survey by Board members is low (just 53% in 2023 and 61% in 2024). Board members are the strategic leaders of the organisation, and have great influence over the culture.
6. Appendix 2 also contains recruitment data. Whilst recruitment statistics indicate a general balance of female and male applicants, and above average numbers of LGBTQ+ applicants (9% in 2022 and 12% in 2023), there are low numbers of applicants with a disability (16% in 2022, but 6% in 2023) and the significant majority of applicants are heterosexual, white Scottish (just 4% Black and Ethnic applicants in 2022 and 6% in 2023).
7. Appendix 3 is the Equal Pay Audit. This audit shows that women make up 57% of our workforce but are under-represented at senior level, with only 25% of our senior management team being women. There has been limited turnover at this level minimising opportunities to address this, and our recruitment has led to more gender balanced candidate shortlists, but we need to continue to focus action to address the fact that our leadership team lacks diversity, with a significant majority of white males.

### **Actions**

We have identified five key steps we need to take to achieve this outcome:



1. Foster an inclusive culture and embed the newly adopted principles within a reenergised drive to focus internal work around our culture and behaviours.
2. Promote and support effective voice to ensure our employee views are listened to and considered to inform our approach to equality.
3. Ensure that all staff learning and development embeds the principles of diversity.
4. Embed equality and inclusion principles across our approach to governance, strategy and policy development.
5. Recruitment procedures will be more welcoming and supportive of minority applicants.

## **Equality outcome 2**

Led by Colin Simpson, Head of Visitor Services; Sarah Henshall, Head of Conservation and Alan Smith, Outdoor Learning and Engagement Manager

**We will target our infrastructure investment and develop our activities so as to continue reducing barriers to access and facilitating inclusive and affordable access to the nature of the National Park, and to the opportunities offered in the National Park.**

### **Evidence**

This outcome applies to residents and visitors. Since shortly after its inception the Cairngorms National Park Authority has commissioned visitor surveys every five years with these carried out independently by specialist research companies. The most recent survey runs from May 2024 to April 2025 and while full year results will not be available until summer 2025, interim results for the summer period of May to September 2024 provide good data as an evidence base for this equality outcome. This evidence is based on face to face interviews at a range of 35 sites and locations across the National Park (848 interviews) and a further 588 responses collected via an online survey. For the first time a similar survey of National Park residents was commissioned, starting in autumn 2024 but again this will not report until well into 2025. Once available, evidence from that survey will also be used to inform activity and as a baseline for measurement.

### **Reasons for visiting and activities undertaken on a visit**

Evidence from the summer 2024 visitor survey shows that “Experiencing the beauty of nature” was the primary driver of visits to the National Park with 58% of visitors surveyed face to face and 78% of those online giving this as the reason for their visit. After the more



“passive” activities of general sightseeing and relaxation, the main activities undertaken were walking (75% had taken part in some sort of walking, with walks of under three miles / 5 km the most popular (54%) and wildlife watching where 43% had participated). Although not an activity in its own right “enhancing physical health or wellbeing” were also drivers for 29% of visitors. With strong correlations between health and access to nature this, alongside the popularity of the specific activities described, gives a strong indication that suitable infrastructure such as parking, transport, paths and trails to allow people to walk and to see wildlife, and other aspects of nature such as the wider natural environment of the Cairngorms, are of significant importance to our visitors.

### **Visitors’ experiences in the National Park**

Questions relating to a broad range of facilities and services help us understand what is important to visitors, while further questions give an indication of levels of satisfaction with those facilities and services. Responses overwhelmingly show that visitors to the Cairngorms had a positive experience, but some closer analysis does identify areas for improvement.

Condition of paths and tracks was considered important to 79% of visitors (34% rating this as very important and 45% as quite important) while 74% said ease of access / accessibility was important (20% rating this as very important and 54% as quite important). For suitability of the National Park and facilities for older groups, 82% rated this as important (27% rating this as very important and 55% as quite important). When respondents were subsequently asked about the quality of facilities:

- 96% were satisfied with the condition of paths and trails (22% very satisfied, 74% satisfied).
- 95% were satisfied with the suitability of the National Park and facilities for older groups (15% very satisfied, 80% satisfied).
- 91% were satisfied with ease of access / accessibility (14% very satisfied, 77% satisfied).

Although all received very high scores, the smaller proportions scoring “very satisfied” for the suitability of facilities for older groups and satisfaction with accessibility questions suggest improvements could be made in this area. A more specific question was asked of those who stated that they would have benefitted from accessibility provisions, with 43% indicating they were unable to access them. This would indicate further activity to address the barriers faced by those visitor groups is required.

### **Profile of visitors**



A series of profiling questions were asked in order to identify the types of visitor coming to the National Park which also gives some useful indications as to where future promotional activities and investment in facilities and services should be directed.

### **Ethnicity**

Almost all (97%) of those interviewed face to face were of white or European ethnicities, the same proportion as in 2019. In part this may reflect the relatively high proportion of visitors coming from surrounding areas such as Highland and Aberdeenshire (both 12%) where numbers from ethnic minority groups are below the national average. None the less this indicates more needs to be done to diversify the ethnicity of visitors to the National Park.

### **Gender and identity**

In relation to questions on sex assigned at birth and gender identity, under 2% of respondents identified as being from LGBTQ+ groups which is below the national average of 4% suggesting more needs to be done to increase the diversity of visitors to the National Park.

### **Socio-economic groups**

In comparison to 2019 and 2014, there appears to have been an uplift in the proportion of visitors who are in the AB SEG group, and a corresponding decline in C1, C2, DE groups. There is some anecdotal evidence that with the rising cost of living, those on lower incomes are less likely to travel and spend time in the Cairngorms as a result of reduced disposable income. This in turn indicates a continued need to invest in facilities that offer free or low-cost experiences, including walking and experiencing nature, if those groups are still to be attracted to the Cairngorms.

Scotland's People and Nature Survey (SPANS) is a large-scale population survey that provides detailed data on how adults in Scotland use, value, and enjoy the outdoors and connect with nature. The latest results from 2024 indicate that, across Scotland people from lower socio-economic status groups access nature less than those from higher income groups.

Access to facilities, which is largely determined by drive times and access to public transport, is the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) domain in which areas of the Cairngorms National Park have high levels of deprivation relative to the rest of Scotland.

### **Physical or mental health conditions**



Only 4% reported this year that they had a physical or mental health condition expecting to last for 12 months or more which is a steep decline on 2019 and 2014 figures (9% and 7% respectively) but it should be caveated that in 2014 and 2019 the wording of the question was different. Visitors aged 65+ were significantly more likely to have a physical health condition (7%) than the overall sample. With 15% of visitors aged over 65, an ageing population (including a further 18% of respondents in the 55-64 age category) there is a need to focus investment to meet the needs of these groups.

### **Activities to be undertaken**

Activities that will be undertaken to promote and facilitate access to the nature of the National Park will include:

- Investment in improved paths and trails to provide more km of accessible trails.
- Improved signposting and interpretation on trails to assist a wider range of users.
- Work with Badenoch and Strathspey Access panel and others to update their access guide and widen it out to cover the whole of the National Park.
- Supporting partner investment in public toilet facilities (including where possible changing places facilities) so as to better cater for visitors accessing nature. This is anticipated to be predominantly through support for facilities outside the built-up areas.
- Supporting Cairngorms Nature partner initiatives promoting access to nature, learning experiences and opportunities to get involved.
- Supporting development and implementation of local nature festivals such as Deeside Nature Festival.
- Continuing to support and expand the Junior Ranger project to include young people facing barriers to participation due to income and health.
- Develop an improved network of active travel routes as well as schemes to support low cost access to bikes and cycle confidence initiatives that allow people to travel in and around communities in the National Park at a low cost.
- Working with local authority partners to investigate and trial additional sustainable transport options such as community transport and dial a bus services to improve access for those without access to a private car.
- Continue operating and promoting the Volunteer Cairngorms programme including developing family volunteering opportunities, taking into account those on low-income.





- Continue work with partners, notably landowners to offer the Volunteer Experience programme which delivers programmes that allow access to nature and conservation volunteering opportunities to under-represented groups.
- Continued promotion of the Cairngorms Travel Grant that supports the travel costs of groups of young people or other under-represented groups to travel to and experience nature in the National Park.
- Re-introduction of the Cairngorms on a Shoestring programme.

### **Equality outcome 3**

Led by Olly Davies, Head of Communications and Engagement

**A more diverse range of audiences will be actively involved in informing the future direction and management of the Cairngorms National Park, including through direct engagement in Park Authority-led consultations and stakeholder forums / groups.**

#### **Evidence**

A huge amount of work has gone into this area over the past few years, from developing partnerships with specific organisations to embedding widening participation as a core principle in the Cairngorms 2030 programme. Staff training has taken place around gathering robust equalities data, the importance of intersectionality and embedding core equalities principles, with more to follow in the new year.

Data from recent consultations suggests that progress has been made, albeit with much still to do. For example, out of the over 1,600 people who responded to our fire management byelaws consultation, 20% considered themselves to be on a low income, 7% of respondents described their sexual orientation as bi, bisexual, gay or lesbian, and 20% said they were currently living with a physical or mental health condition or illness. Meanwhile, for our Gaelic Language Plan consultation 7% of responses were received in Gaelic (up 244% on five years ago) and 3% of responses came from people identifying as trans.

One area requiring specific focus is encouraging responses from ethnic minority communities. The specific demography of the Cairngorms, with 98.5% of residents being white, means that more of our work needs to take place beyond the National Park boundary, particularly in the surrounding cities of Inverness, Aberdeen, Perth and Dundee. Our new Cairngorms 2030 lived experience group, developed in partnership with community engagement specialists Talat Yaqoob and Iffat Shahnaz, will help with this, as



should our growing partnerships with organisations like Black Professionals UK, Black Scottish Adventurers, GirlDreamer and Muslim Hikers.

### **Actions**

1. Continue to collect robust equalities data on all Park Authority-led consultation activity. Prioritise under-represented communities in our promotional activity to support these consultations.
2. Further strengthen partnerships with community-based organisations such as Black Scottish Adventurers, Cairngorms Pride Paddlers, LGBT Youth Scotland and Able2Adventure, whilst also seeking to develop new relationships with key partners.
3. Establish and empower a new lived experience group to shape the delivery of Cairngorms 2030, working closely with the EAP. This will have a specific focus on engaging with ethnic minority communities in and around the National Park.
4. Explore participatory democracy methods in the co-design of our £1 million community-managed climate grants scheme, with a particular emphasis on widening participation.
5. Ensure equalities considerations are at the forefront of the development, testing and rollout of our new website, including core functionality, imagery and ongoing content. Continue to share stories from a diverse range of perspectives via our other channels, including our social media channels and *Cairn* residents' magazine.
6. Provide captioning and / or BSL interpretation on request for all live streamed forums and meetings held by the Park Authority, including Board and planning meetings.
7. Review all Park Authority promotional materials, particularly those relating to stakeholder consultation, to ensure they use appropriate imagery reflective of the diverse range of audiences engaging with the National Park. Commission new material (photography, video, case studies etc) on an ongoing basis.